

CHURCH LEADERSHIP TRAINING MANUAL: UTILIZING RADICAL  
HOSPITALITY ADDRESSING HIGH RECIDIVISM RATE OF  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE OFFENDERS IN OHIO

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **CHURCH LEADERSHIP TRAINING MANUAL: UTILIZING RADICAL HOSPITALITY ADDRESSING HIGH RECIDIVISM RATE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE OFFENDERS IN OHIO**

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The hypothesis of this ministry project is if church leadership can understand a radical hospitality model it can have an impact on the attitudes, future policies and practices concerning African American male ex-offenders. It is my conviction if the attitudes and practices of the church leadership are changed, recidivism can be reduced and ex-offenders can be positively impacted. This study is important because it will give hope to the ‘returning citizen’ and transform his life. It will provide new life beyond prison walls. A qualitative research methodology with a one-day workshop, journaling and in-depth interviews were used with the participants.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This project and dissertation could not have been completed without the help of the Almighty God and the many people who constantly prayed with me during this journey. The writer acknowledges the mighty power of God in providing the vision and the ability to tackle such a worthwhile adventure. This work could not have been done without the countless hours of assistance from my context associates, professional associates, peers and colleagues.

Special thanks to my dynamic mentors and consultant for their leadership and support during this process. They have helped make this learning experience transformational, enjoyable, and extraordinarily productive both spiritually and intellectually along the path of expanding my knowledge in this area.

Thanks to my family, including my lovely wife, for the support they rendered to me. My siblings, Mrs. Julia Bing-Kajue and Mrs. Laurintine Bing-Burphy encouraged and supported me throughout this process. They were very tolerant and understanding in helping me complete this project. Special thanks to Chuck who opened his home to me and asked nothing in return. Chuck exemplified a living example of radical hospitality to me. I am so grateful!

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to my late mother, Mrs. Keziah Greene Bing Reeves, who gave me practical lessons about radical hospitality. To my late brother, J. Llewellyn Bing, who practiced radical hospitality to everyone he met. The project is also dedicated to my six children, Archline, Alexis, John Lewis, Archmarie, Archkeziah, and Archelaine for their understanding, conversation and support during this journey. I cannot forget my grandchildren, especially Keziah, Johari (JoJo) and Maya who encouraged me to learn and grow in wisdom and knowledge with the help of God Almighty!

## INTRODUCTION

The problem of recidivism is a complex issue for federal and state institutions as well as to all communities to which African-American male ex-offenders return. As a prison chaplain, it is my belief that this study and its outcomes can help transform the lives of African-American male ex-offenders when they are released from prison. Most importantly, the ex-offender must be willing to accept support from the Christian community after they are released to assist them through the process.

Coming to this country as an exile from war-torn Liberia, it is understandable how an African-American male ex-offender feels when released from prison and is not welcomed by the Christian community. Arriving in the United States of America, if it had not been for the Christian communities offering radical hospitality, I would not have survived. It was The United Methodist Church in Maryland that whole-heartedly embraced and extended radical hospitality to me.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, African-American males make up forty-nine percent of prison inmates nationally, compared to their thirteen percent share of the overall population.<sup>1</sup> Nearly one in three (thirty-two percent) black males in the age group twenty to twenty-nine is under some form of criminal justice supervision in any

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all data on prison and jail populations throughout is taken from various reports of the Bureau of Justice Statistics.



given day—either in prison or jail, or on probation or parole.<sup>2</sup> This Sentencing Project reports that while African American males have been the most severely affected demographic group within the criminal justice system, other minorities have also been disproportionately affected. Hispanics now constitute seventeen percent of the prison population nationally, compared to their ten percent share of the total population.<sup>3</sup> It is important for the Church’s leadership to understand the modus operandi of the penal system.

For the purpose of this project, it is necessary to focus on the concept of radical hospitality, which includes:

- Welcoming the ex-offenders into a place of acceptance.
- Engaging the ex-offenders socially, biblically, theologically and politically.
- Mentoring the ex-offenders.

The goal is to create a model for ministry that will address and help ameliorate problems that African-American males encounter when released from prison. It is proposed that these “returning citizens” need restoration. While restore can mean “to put back into order”, in this paper, restore is being utilized to address how faith communities are called to act in ways that help recover, to bring together what has been scattered or separated, to redeem from a lesser condition, to reconstruct something that has been broken, to rebuild what has been destroyed or dismantled.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> March Mauer and Tracy Huling, “*Young Black Americans and the Criminal Justice System: Five Years Later*,” The Sentencing Project, (Washington, D.C., October 1995).1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Shopshire, Mark C. Hicks, and Richmond Stoglin, eds., *I Was in Prison: United Methodist Perspectives On Prison Ministry* (Nashville: United Methodist General Board of Higher Education, 2008) 4.

For a social context, restore itself means to initiate a creative and constructive process that brings together the parts into a whole. When a person or community loses its unifying purpose and relationship, a process is needed that brings back together or “re-orders” its relationships.<sup>5</sup>

The hypothesis has been that if the leadership of the church can acquire an understanding of a radical hospitality model then it can have an impact on the attitudes, future policies and practices of church leadership concerning African American male ex-offenders. It is believed that if the attitudes and practices of the church leadership are changed, recidivism can be reduced and ex-offenders can be positively impacted. This study is important because it will give hope to the “returning citizen” and transform his life . . . providing a new life beyond prison walls.

### **Limitation of Research Project**

Of course, although this research is largely addressing the plight of African-American males returning to their respective communities, it is not its intent to limit itself to this population; not in terms of its broader application. Other racial groups: Hispanic, Native Americans, Caucasians and Asians are taken into consideration albeit to a lesser measure in terms of a discussion of their social, political and economic background. However, a greater implication for this study is its body of research and the subsequent manual that can be adapted to any large or smaller setting wherever people having the same experiences and similar realities cohabit.

This research is neither limited to the geographical area of Madison County nor Franklin County where the facility in this study is located. Citizens released from

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<sup>5</sup> Shopshire, 4.

Madison return to Columbus, Springfield, Dayton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and other Ohio communities. These individuals will need faith communities in these cities to embrace and welcome them. This requires radical Christian hospitality attitudes.

Chapter one reflects on spiritual growth, educational, professional and leadership influences within the church and Christian community that has birthed this project. Consequently, it explores some of my ministry goals and passion in ministry, in addressing the importance of providing a voice for the incarcerated released from prison. In addition, this chapter provides details regarding the ministry context, including demographics of the institution and the community in which it is located.

Chapter Two deals with the history of prison in the United States of America, particularly as it relates to radical hospitality to ex-offenders being released from incarceration.

Chapter Three examines theoretical foundations of radical hospitality through an in-depth look at the historical, Biblical and theological framework of this research project. The goal is to bring a new awareness of the social, and religious implications of utilizing radical hospitality as a tool to acclimate African-American male ex-offenders back into the community, based upon both Old Testament and New Testament Theology.

Chapter Four provides the methodology and action-research design used to evaluate participants involvement in this research project. Through surveys, pre- and post-tests, in-depth interviews, journaling and an all-day workshop, data from these tools have led to a clearer understanding of the problems and obstacles to overcome for African-American male ex-offenders returning to the community upon being released from incarceration.

Chapter Five presents data analysis and interpretation of the action-research design. Implications for the future duplication by church leadership can be achieved; providing professional and personal insights through shared transformative learning experiences with church leadership while being a participant and observer in this project as chaplain, teacher, analyst, and historian.

Chapter Six gives a summary, reflection and conclusion of this project with some recommendations for further study in the area of providing radical hospitality to African-American male ex-offenders returning to the community after leaving prison so that the rate of recidivism in Ohio may be further reduced.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

There is power in sharing your life stories. Everyone has a story to tell because God is active in each of our lives. According to author Richard Peace, a spiritual autobiography is the story of God's interaction in our lives. He states that "it chronicles our pilgrimage as we seek to follow God."<sup>1</sup>

#### **Formative Years**

I was born on August 1, sixty plus years ago in Greenville, Sinoe County, West Africa (four hundred miles from Monrovia, Liberia), a country founded by former American slaves over 160 years ago. The government was structured similarly to that of the United States, operating as a democracy, built around a relatively stable economy. The flag is similar in appearance to the United States with only one star and the red, white and blue colors.

There were four children in the Bing household. Father had two other children, a girl and a boy. This family was a nuclear family. Father was a Methodist pastor and so the family resided in the church's parsonage. Mother was a school teacher and taught in the public school system for many years. Father was also a public school teacher. Both of

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Peace, *Spiritual Autobiography: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Story* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1998), 1.

them taught school for twenty years or more. They later pursued other careers, Father becoming a carpenter and mother training as a customs officer.

Mother and father always sat with the family every evening at the dinner table. During this “family time,” stories were shared about what went on in school that particular day. The family looked forward to this interaction each day. The children would share and then their father and mother would also tell stories about their day. Their mother or father would end this time together with a simple prayer. Every night before going to bed, mother would ask her children to join her in saying nightly prayers. Sometimes our father would join in, if he were home. During those formative years, I followed my parents to worship, not attempting to understand why they went to church every Sunday. It was known that father was the pastor and thought we were obligated to be there every Sunday. However, my mother was a praying woman and she made us attend church regularly. She would dress us in our “Sunday best,” and we would march before her. The walk to church was brief— the parsonage was next to the church.

When our parents had to go out, I would watch my younger siblings. Being the oldest child, I thought that I was in charge and would try to exercise my authority over them. This habit of exercising authority over others stayed with me all through my adulthood. The family was close knit and, although we were not “rich” folks, our father and mother provided for our needs. Our father would go to work from Sunday to Friday, but on Friday evening, especially when it was pay day, he would come home intoxicated. He was not disruptive nor did he cause any trouble with anyone while he was inebriated. During this time, our father would go grocery shopping and come home with bags of food for the family. However, he would openly weep for his mother and boast about

himself and his children. He would say: “my children know book...I know book...don’t mess with us!”

During those days, the churches in the community would come together to have revivals. One revival was held at the First Presbyterian Church in Greenville. During the altar call one evening, I followed the other children and knelt at the mourner’s bench. The mourner’s bench was like an altar where people gathered to pray for their sins. Some children had done this for several services, praying on their knees, and asking God to forgive them of their sins; but it seemed that their prayers were not being heard. Therefore, I decided to pray even harder and becoming very intentional about asking God to come into my life and forgive my sins. While praying, one of the elders of the church was heard saying, “This must be the son of ‘sweet thing’ here, and we need to lay our hands on him.” When they got through laying their hands and praying, there was a strange feeling over my entire body which caused me to shout: “I’m delivered! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” The elders explained that I had gotten “religion.” Asked why they had called me the son of ‘sweet thing,’ the elders told me the story of my father at the “mourner’s bench.” They said that my father came out of the service unclothed and paraded the streets around the church. He told everyone he met that getting religion was so sweet. That became his nickname: “sweet thing.”

The events during the formative years formed a solid foundation for future growth and development in my life.

### **Adolescent Years**

Every year my father would leave us to attend his church's annual conference. Usually, these annual conferences were held in other political sub-divisions of the country.

It was uncertain what happened, but our father did not return from one of those conferences. In fact, we later learned that he had divorced our mother and was married to another lady. This was one of the significant bad memories in my life. With my father leaving without any kind of explanation, it became necessary to step into my father's place and become the "man of the house." Still young and not knowing how to go about this, attempted to do my possible best to be more responsible. It was a hopeless and abandoned feeling. It was a difficult time for all of us. It became devastating and confusing, as to the reason or reasons my father would leave this way.

My mother's meager salary could not sustain the family, and so we ended up moving in with the younger brother of our mother. This brother was the only father mother knew. Her parents had died when she was a child and she had to live without a father or a mother. This uncle had a much bigger house and we were the same age as his children. Both uncle and his wife openly accepted us as members of their family, but their children, our cousins, did not. Some days, we were treated as "step-children". We had to share textbooks with our cousins because mother could not afford to purchase any books. We were allowed to attend the St. Joseph Catholic Elementary School along with our cousins. We had to carry the book bags of our cousins to school in order to use the books.

Uncle was like a father. Whether it was clothes or shoes he bought for his biological children, he bought the same items for us. He took me fishing with him on the lake nearby and even taught me how to drive when he bought his first car.



Mother was a stern disciplinarian. One day after she had bought me an old bicycle, she gave me a dollar to purchase something that she needed from the corner store. In my excitement over this “new” bike, the dollar got lost and was not able to purchase the item she needed. My mother told me to pull my pants down and she gave me a good whipping. She told him that it was not the dollar he was being whipped for, but it was the fact that she wanted him to be careful in anything he did. That lesson has remained with me until this day.

To make it possible for me to attend high school, our family had to relocate to Monrovia, the capital city. After attending a Catholic elementary school in Greenville it was expected that St. Patrick’s High School would offer a quality education as well. St. Patrick’s was one of the prominent secondary schools in the country. My mother could not afford to pay my tuition at that time. Money was scarce and mother had to find a job in the city. We had just moved from Todee and had to find a place to live. In the meantime, my mother assured me that God will make a way to enable me to attend St. Patrick’s High School if that was my desire. I trusted my mother, but had some doubts about God making a way for me.

To assist with the increasing expenses, it was necessary to find a job tutoring some children in the neighborhood, just to earn money to help out in a small way. The absence of my father placed a heavy financial burden on my mother. Remembering fondly two old men that contracted me to tutor their children in the afternoons. One of them offered to pay the tuition and purchase textbooks for the first year at St. Patrick. Both men were considered surrogate fathers to me.

During my adolescent years, I was always shy and not so friendly. What was lacking during this period in my life was a father. However, the men that were mentioned here greatly impacted my life. They became the father that was absent from the home. They offered me radical hospitality.

### **Adult Years**

It was good to remember graduating from St. Patrick's High School with nineteen classmates, five of which are now deceased. One of them, a childhood friend, was already a freshman when I enrolled at St. Patrick's. We continued our friendship until his death. This friend would visit our home and my mother would share my meal with him. Getting home and noticing that someone had eaten a portion of my meal, my mother would always say, "You know that your friend was here. He looked very hungry and I offered him something to eat." Because it was not a practice to argue with my mother, but would wonder why she did not give him some of her food instead of mine. Not realizing that my mother was teaching me how to practice radical hospitality.

My friend was a brilliant student, but he was an alcoholic. When my mother died, my friend made sure he attended her funeral. Later, my friend became gravely ill and he summoned me to his bedside. On my way to visit my younger brother, who was seeking medical attention in Ghana, West Africa, I visited my friend in the hospital. He was lying there, looking so pale and dehydrated. He said, "Archie, the doctors have given up on me and I am sure I am going to die, but take good care of my little sister." He went on to say, "You know, Archie; it was that liquor drinking that got me in this predicament. You did warn me, but I did not listen to you. I am sorry, my brother." While visiting my brother in

Ghana my friend died. It was a sad time for me. He had been such a good friend and he was considered a member of our family. My younger brother died two weeks after the death of my childhood friend.

While at St. Patrick, it was a blessing to study religion and, for some reason, I became good at it; making only A's in my religion courses. After high school it was on to the University of Liberia, enrolling in the William V. S. Tubman School of Education. I graduated with a Bachelor of Secondary Education, majoring in history and government with a minor in business administration. After graduation, an invitation was extended to teach Catholic Doctrine at my alma mater, St. Patrick's High School. However, this was not appropriate as attendance at church services was irregular and I was not a Catholic.

Immediately upon graduation from the University of Liberia, It was necessary to return to Greenville, the place of my birth, to teach at the local high school. Thought it was the right thing to do. It was my desire to contribute my time and services to the development of my people, believing that education was the key to success and the gateway out of poverty. For six months paychecks for services rendered at the high school were not forth-coming. If my uncle had not been around, it would have been disastrous. Uncle provided a place to stay and food to eat during the six months I was teaching at this high school.

Eventually, it was time to travel to Monrovia to see about the reason my salary checks were not forthcoming. The only explanation the department of education could give me was that my checks may have been misplaced.

Little did I know that God had sent me to Greenville for a reason? I was able to find the first love of my life. This lovely lady was a young high school graduate, and the

daughter of my Godmother. The mother of this lady had known me as a baby and gladly accepted me as a son. In her quest for knowledge, the young lady matriculated to the University of Liberia to study economics. She graduated and became a teacher in Monrovia. We got engaged and were making wedding plans. My mother was very protective of me and she did not approve of our relationship. My mother would tolerate and accept any girl being friendly with me, but as soon as the relationship became serious, mother would find some fault. She would try to find something to say about the parents of the girl or about the behavior of the girl. Unfortunately, several months later, this young lady died from some unknown illness. I just could not get over her death. It was a real shock to me. I kept asking God, "Where are you God? Why do you allow such a thing to happen?" Since God did not seem to answer me, I found myself becoming less and less interested in church or religious activities.

While attending the University of Liberia, my mother married a Nurse Anesthetist at the J. F. K. Maternity Hospital. He was the one who circumcised me and two of my first cousins. Later, my stepfather spoke with the hospital administrator, to employ me as a clerk in her office. I worked with the hospital administrator following graduation from the University of Liberia. Then I decided to go and teach at the Sinoe High School, but she did not readily approve of this decision. She had hoped for me to travel to the U.S.A. to study hospital administration. After my departure, the hospital administrator kept calling for me to return. She would say, Bing, when are you coming back I need you to return as soon as possible.

Consequently it was time to get back to the Maternity Hospital after working six months in Greenville and not receiving any salaries. Nine months after my returned to the

Maternity Hospital, a USAID scholarship was awarded for me to study hospital administration at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where I earned an International Diploma in Health Care Administration and later a Master of Business and Public Administration in Health Care Management degree from Southeastern University, also in Washington, D.C.

Upon returning home in 1980 after completing my studies in the United States, I was appointed Deputy Hospital Administrator at the Maternity Hospital. The hospital administrator was extremely glad to have me on the administrative staff at the hospital. After only five months, a military coup toppled the government of Liberia. A Master Sergeant became Head of State. Tribal ethnicity had plagued Liberia for generations; plurality eventually dissipated any racial barriers separating freed slaves from the original tribesmen. Then, on April 12, 1980, hostilities amid the indigenous population escalated into a political coup. The president and all of his top officials of government were brutally slaughtered or gunned down.

The military officers were mostly illiterate and were very cruel to those who were highly educated and in government. Prior to the coup, I had looked forward to career advancement in the health care field in Liberia because there were few trained hospital administrators in the country.

The General Administrator appointed me hospital administrator of the Maternity after the military coup. This was a great challenge for me. Mostly illiterate people in authority surrounded me. They could not understand the concepts of managing a health care facility, but they were my immediate bosses. I was jailed for a night for assisting a family member who needed to transport her grandmother to the hospital. She was given a

gas slip to purchase gasoline because the hospital's ambulance was in the repair shop. I was wrongfully accused of theft and spent the night in jail. While locked up I experienced shame, disgrace, and humiliation, but the Minister of Justice released me the following day.

During these difficult times, I was not attending church services, but my mother was a member of a prayer band (Tuesday Cottage) and she would occasionally invite me to attend. It was held every week day at twelve o'clock. The prayer band was made up of some of the praying mothers of the community. They all wore white dresses to the prayer meetings. While attending this prayer band meeting, several prophecies were made that the Lord was calling me to preach, but I did not want to hear that. I was into nightclubs and chasing women business. I could get any woman at any time and had maids and servants, chauffeurs, cooks, and laundry attendants at my command. I thought this was what it takes to live a "good" life.

My father came back into the lives of his children after we had received our education. Not questioning our father about the reason(s) he had abandoned us but accepted him wholeheartedly, based on the commandment, "Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."<sup>2</sup> Our father did not live far away and he introduced his new wife to us. She was a church lady and had him in church nearly every Sunday. They attended a Pentecostal Holiness Church.

It was obvious that my father had made some changes in his life. He had stopped drinking alcohol and he was in church. I struggle with the fact that my father was absent

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<sup>2</sup> Joel B. Green and William H. Willimon, eds. *New Revised Standard Version Wesley Study Bible*: Green/brown Faux Leather Edition. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 94.

from us, but still had love and respect for him. Therefore, when my father came to see me, it was an opportunity to reconcile with him. However, I resolved never to be like my father nor abandon my children.

It was an honor to spend three months as a United Nations Fellow in 1982, at the International Hospital Federation in London, England, studying health care administration. My sister and her family were residing in Manchester, U.K., and this was an opportunity to visit with them during this time in England. Returning home I resumed my work as the Hospital Administrator of the Maternity Hospital.

After serving four years at the Maternity Hospital as the administrator, it was time to relocate to a new facility. The deplorable state, the increases in the deliveries of babies, and the over-crowdedness rendered this hospital unfit to operate. I was instrumental in getting a modern facility built by the Japanese government. The Japanese ambassador visited the hospital one day and asked me what the people of Japan could do to help the Liberian people. He was told about the situation at the hospital. The ambassador consented to convey that message to his government. The government of Japan built a maternity hospital and it was dedicated as the Liberian-Japanese Friendship Hospital. I was fortunate to be on the design team of the hospital, organizing the move of patients and staff to this newly built, 267-bed hospital. My office had been set-up and designed, and it was anticipated that it was the perfect office for me. It was thought that everything was in place until my boss called me to his office and told me that he was sending me to the Catherine Mills Rehabilitation (Psychiatric) Hospital. The action made me mad and I asked my boss why he was denying me the opportunity to continue as the administrator of the new Maternity Hospital? Something told me to fight this move because it was not

fair. I was not trained in mental health nor had any prior experience working with “crazy” people. This was scary!

This was one of the significant good and, at the same time, bad events in the journey of my life. Bad because it was thought that I deserved to be allowed to continue administrating the operations of the new Maternity Hospital, but was not afforded that opportunity. It was time to question God, How would God allow such a thing to happen? Good because this incident brought God back into my life and helped me to begin unearthing the treasures in my spiritual life.

The boss wanted to know, by the following Monday, if I would accept the assignment or not. Fortunately I found myself praying that entire weekend. The Tuesday Cottage prayer band members were requested to pray about my situation. Early Monday morning God spoke to me in a soft and determined voice, “I am the one sending you to that place and I will be with you because I want you to do something about the conditions there and to see how my children are being inhumanly treated.”

After receiving this message from God, it was encouraging and convincing for me to tell my boss it was time to go, but on the following conditions:

- This writer would need his support in getting what was needed.
- He should honor the purchase requests for needed items.
- He would not interfere in the day-to-day operations of the hospital.

Upon arriving at the Catherine Mills Rehabilitation Hospital, the first thing that caught my eyes was the poor sanitation of the entire hospital, lack of required psychiatric drugs, and the poor quality and preparation of the meals. There was no running water in any of the buildings. A single well was situated in the middle of the yard. It was there the



patients (male and female) took their daily bath. They also would wash their clothes and get water from the well for cooking and drinking.

Noticing that there were no utensils; the meals were served in rusty cans; and the patients ate with their bare fingers. This was a terrible sight to see. When questioned about this practice, the dietitian had no justification but to blame the previous administration for the mess they were in.

Immediately the dietitian was directed (1) to order utensils, dishes, pans, and pots; and (2) to come up with a weekly menu for the hospital. She had developed two separate meals, one for the staff and the other for the patients. The staff meals were excellent, while the patient meals were insufficient for a pig. The dietitian was instructed to prepare the same meal for both staff and patients.

With the assistance of some American Baptists, who were working at the nearby Baptist Seminary, the hospital was able to receive hygiene supplies, utensils, and a promise of two additional wells. The seminary utilized the hospital for their students to conduct their field study.

The professors from the seminary heard that I was coming and they came over to meet me. It turned out to be a very fruitful meeting. Not only did they offer valuable assistance to the hospital, but they also extended an invitation for me to attend some of their classes. This was an indication that God was making a way to equip me since God was calling me to this place a long time ago. I never realized that God was beginning to prepare me for ministry. Recalling Paul's letter to Timothy, when Paul wrote in II Timothy, Chapter 3, verses 14-17:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you

have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scriptures are God-breathed and are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.<sup>3</sup>

The boss did not honor the conditions presented to him after accepting the position as hospital administrator of the psychiatric hospital. All of the requests to the boss were ignored. Subsequently, I decided to send a letter to remind him about all that was promised. The boss became so angry he threatened to dismiss me. However, I had already enrolled at the seminary and was about to receive a Bachelor of Religious Education degree. The boss was invited to the graduation, but did not show up. My boss subsequently transferred me from the psychiatric hospital to the John F. Kennedy Memorial General Hospital.

The pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, was consulted about my calling by God to the Gospel ministry.

The pastor insisted that some time be given to this thought and he would see me after six months. It was though the pastor did not believe that I was ready for ordination. In the meantime, the pastor began to expose me to the liturgy, doctrine, and polity of the Presbyterian Church. After six months, along with five other candidates, I was ordained an Elder in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Monrovia, Liberia. The prophecy of those praying mothers had finally been fulfilled. I became the assistant to the pastor and was in church every Sunday. I became active within the men's department and taught in the Sabbath School.

Regrettably, uncle died in the USA and I was forced to leave Liberia. My boss

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<sup>3</sup>Zondervan, *Zondervan NIV Study Bible: New International Version*, Fully ed. (Grand Rapids, M.I: Zondervan, 2002), 1885.

initially refused to grant me a leave of absence to travel to the United States of America. Having explained to the boss that my uncle was like a father. In fact, mother was already in the U.S.A. taking care of her brother, my uncle. After listening to the explanation given, he granted me a leave of absence for only two weeks. Thanksgiving to God for allowing this opportunity to make the trip to the U.S.A. was in place. If he had given only a week, it would have been good. The boss said that if I did not return after the two weeks, he would find my replacement. I just wanted to get out of the situation. The state of unrest and insecurity in Liberia at that time was a grave concern for me.

Arriving in Washington, D.C., with only twenty-five dollars in my pocket was a problem. I had changed some of the Liberian dollars for American dollars with an American doctor, who had just returned from the states. He could only change fifty dollars. Arriving at the church, the wake-keeping of uncle was going on. The next day was the funeral services and it was a glorious time of remembering the life of uncle. Everybody at the funeral services was so glad to see me. A tribute, honoring the life of uncle was read by me at the funeral the next day. Other close friends of the family shared memories. We thanked God for giving uncle to us and that all were blessed to be loved by him. He was a great uncle to all of us! There was a lavish repast after the burial.

Following the burial of uncle his children could no longer afford to keep the apartment he was living in, and asked me and my mother, who was living there, to leave.

While pursuing my studies as a hospital administrator in the USA, I became acquainted with the supervisor of the hospital housekeeping department at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. This Supervisor, after learning that I was an ordained Elder, introduced me to the director of the Clinical Pastoral Education Department. An

application was filled out and the director accepted me into the Internship program in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). This position included a stipend and the education needed to become a chaplain. Three basic and two advance units of CPE were completed.

Services of a therapist were sought during my training as a chaplain, because of feelings of rejection and not taking any responsibility for my own actions; always blaming others for what was happening to me. Believing that people did not love me; therefore, attempting to buy their love. CPE helped me deal with all of these issues in a realistic manner. The therapist showed practical ways to deal with the issues at hand. He made me understand that, to help others with their issues and problems, it must first start with my own issues and problems.

Going through this CPE experience, making several efforts to connect with the Presbyterian churches in the Washington, D.C., area did not yield any worthwhile results. Most of the supervisors in the CPE program were United Methodist and during one of the sessions, suggested that it would be to my advantage if I could return to my roots—the United Methodist Church. Connections were made with the Beltsville Emmanuel United Methodist Church in the Maryland area, and the pastor and the congregation accepted my entire family into full membership. My family became the first black family to become members of Beltsville United Methodist Church. The pastor and members opened their arms, poured out their hearts, and paid some of my expenses to attend Howard Divinity School. This was radical hospitality.

Upon completing the Chaplain Internship Program, finding a job as a chaplain was problematic; most places wanted someone with a Masters in Divinity degree. Then finding myself again in pursuit of knowledge at the Howard University School of

Divinity in 1990, depending on the promises of God that gave me hope: Whom God calls, God equips.

While attending Howard University, School of Divinity, it became necessary to do all kinds of odd jobs: Served as a vocational and residential counselor for autistic children and adults in Rockville, Maryland and the following year, as a Ford Foundation Fellowship recipient, working as assistant volunteer coordinator with an AIDS project, Impact, D.C. I added to my experiences in 1993, by interning at RAP's Inc., a substance abuse treatment center, and directing a summer day camp program at the Ebenezer United Methodist Church, both in Washington, D.C.

My mother died in July of 1992, after a protracted period, suffering from complications of high blood pressure and diabetes. Her death was one that hurt me the most. This woman, my mother, had denied herself so many opportunities and suffered with her children through their lives, from childhood up to adulthood. When it was time to enjoy the fruits of her labor, God took her home. What made this situation even more painful? When mother died, there was no money and I had no decent paying job to even offer to pay for some of the burial expenses. My sister in England had to step in and assume most of the responsibility. One thing that brought some consolation to me was when I was allowed to eulogize my mother at the funeral.

After graduation from Howard University, the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, of which I was a probationary member, could not offer me a position in any local church. The District Superintendent advised that finding a job was my responsibility. God directed me to the bulletin board at the School of Divinity. There was posted a chaplain position in Jefferson City, Missouri. An

application was sent and accepted for the position of state chaplain at the Jefferson City Correctional Institution. This was a maximum-security institution and it was very dangerous. The men at the prison were there for life and had committed some of the most hideous crimes in the state. Every day there was stabbing and fighting going on, attacking both the staff and the inmates. It was God who protected me during the entire tenure of my services at the institution.

In addition to my prison ministry, it was a blessing to pastor two churches: Wesley Chapel in Bowling Green and Scott Chapel in Hannibal. The real issue for me was that my family had to travel from Jefferson City early on Sunday mornings to be at Wesley and Scott chapels on time; then visit the sick before returning to work at the prison.

After an incident in which a young female correctional officer was brutally attacked at the Jefferson Correctional Institution, God was asked to find another place for me to work, if this was His will for me to be a prison chaplain.

God surely found a place. This place was the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, Ohio. However, my house which was purchased only a year and a half ago, must be sold. As God would have it, the same realtor that sold the house to me, when contacted, did not hesitate to arrange for the selling of my house. He was so good that the person who bought the house ended up receiving one month's rent because my family did not move out at the stipulated time.

While at the Ohio Reformatory for Women, it was a blessing to go on a Walk to Emmaus Weekend. This was a very enlightening spiritual experience. I have never experienced the depth of love that was shown and shared throughout that weekend. People who have not seen you or known you before loved you unconditionally. Several

letters were received from family members and strangers that expressed genuine admiration and warm feelings towards me. One would call this experience a glimpse of heaven down here on earth. This experience reassured me of the power of God's grace and forgiveness. This experience prepared me to facilitate several Kairos and Epiphany weekends in the prison setting.

On August 31, 2013, having suffered a congestive heart failure I was forced to request for a temporal disability leave. In October of 2014, it was granted. This resulted in early retirement from the Ohio Department of the Rehabilitation and Corrections.

In Doctor Samuel Dewitt Proctor's book: *The Substance of Things Hoped For*, gave me a great source of strength as this highly educated African-American dealt with the crises and struggles of black folks and white folks in America. With all the challenges, Dr. Proctor continued to press on. He was advocating for the less fortunate in society. Truly, Cornel West said it best, "Samuel Proctor is the towering figure of our time, of intellectual teachers who preach, and intellectual preachers who teach. His life and work exemplify integrity and dignity, grace and wisdom, courage and sacrifice. His inspiration is powerful and poignant."<sup>4</sup> Like Dr. Proctor, I, too, had to endure struggles and challenges in his life journey. The struggles continue.

### **Context of Ministry**

My ministry for the last seventeen years has been at the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC). The ODRC is the sixth largest state correctional system in the United States. The general recidivism rate for Ohio is considerably less

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<sup>4</sup> Proctor, Samuel DeWitt. *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith* (New York: Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995, 1999).1-243.

than the national average: forty-four percent of offenders nationally return to prison within three years, as compared to 31.2 percent in Ohio. Even with these favorable statistics, the ODRC has undertaken a systemic restructuring and realignment of programming and resources with the intent of reducing the offender population and the recidivism rate —while at the same time effecting genuine rehabilitation.<sup>5</sup>

Madison County is located in central Ohio, approximately twenty miles west of Columbus, the capital. The county encompasses 465 square miles of mostly farming and undeveloped wooded land. Interstate 71 is a major north-south interstate that crosses the eastern part of the county. Seven counties border Madison County. Two of them, Clark (Springfield) and Franklin (Columbus), serve as the western and eastern borders respectively and are more urbanized. Madison County is home to Darby Creek, the residential/recreation area of Lake Chocow, and Madison Lake State Park. The county seat and largest town in Madison County is London (population 9,876). West Jefferson, Plain City, and Mt. Sterling are the other towns in Madison County.<sup>6</sup>

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, with its two state prisons in Madison, is a large employer. The headquarters for the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation is also in Madison County. In the last decade this predominantly farming area has seen industrial growth, with industrial parks sprouting up east of London and near West Jefferson.

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<sup>5</sup>Correctional News, last modified May 18, 2011, (accessed December 21, 2012), <http://www.correctionalnews.com/articles/2011/05/18/ohio-looks-reduce-inmate-population-privatize> (accessed December 21, 2012).

<sup>6</sup>Madison County, Ohio quick fact. U.S. Department of Commerce, United States Census Bureau last Revised: Thursday, 27-March 2014, (accessed April 12, 2014) <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/39/39097.html#.UNJX2guXfFo.email>



About eighty-four percent of all workers in Madison County commute nearly half-an-hour to work. Seventy-nine percent of the population twenty-five years or older are high school graduates and thirteen percent have attained a bachelor's degree. Civilian veterans make up 14.8 percent of the population eighteen years old and older.<sup>7</sup>

According to the 2010 US Census, 90.9 percent of Madison County residents are white, 6.8 percent African-American, and the rest Hispanic or biracial. The median age is 35.8 years and nearly twenty percent of the population is fifty-five years or older. The average household size is 2.62 persons and the average family 3.06 persons. Nearly sixty percent of households in Madison County feature married couples, 9.9 single female heads, 22.3 singles without children, and only 9.5 are those sixty-five or older living alone. Nearly all housing units in Madison County are occupied. Only five percent are vacant, the majority of these are rentals. Seventy-two percent of residents live in owner-occupied housing, twenty-eight percent in rental units. Of homes owned by occupants, 47.5 percent are valued at \$99,999 or less. Median rent is \$510 per month.<sup>8</sup> When I was fortunately retired and no longer at the Madison Correctional Institution, United Methodist Church for All People became the context for the implementation and completion of my project.

### *United Methodist Church for All People*

The United Methodist Church for All People was chartered in 2003. This church grew out of the message of unconditional love offered by the Free Store and the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.4allpeople.org/> (Accessed December 2014)

atmosphere of hospitality it created. It is intentionally cross-class and multi-racial. The church is located on the south side of Columbus, Ohio. According to the executive pastor, the church welcomes each person just as they are, no matter who he or she is or what they have done. This church offers an environment where each person can grow in their discipleship and turn their lives toward the light.<sup>9</sup>

The United Methodist Free Store is the flagship ministry of Community Development for All People (CD4AP), the sister organization of the Church for All People. The free store provides free clothing and household items to anyone who seeks them. In 2012, the free store distributed two million dollars' worth of clothing and household items to more than 25,000 different individuals. The success of this ministry has led to the formation of more than seventy-five Free Stores across the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the people who shop at the Free Store and worship at the church have vivid dreams of living in a safe, decent home. These aspirations have led to dynamic initiatives related to the development of affordable housing. CD4AP is in its fourth year of a joint venture with Nationwide Children's Hospital to transform 30 square blocks within the local community. This multi-year project involves purchasing 100+ vacant, blighted houses that will be completely rehabbed and sold as owner-occupied homes.<sup>11</sup>

Community Development and Church for All People offer a variety of direct services out of their ministry center located at 946 Parsons Avenue in Columbus, Ohio. Many of these activities emerged from the dreams of people seeking to improve the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.4allpeople.org/> (Accessed December 2014)

health and wholeness of Columbus' South Side residents. This led some individuals to begin ministries that serve meals to folks who are hungry. Now four meals are served each week to more than 500 people. All meals are prepared and served by volunteers from partner faith communities. Other persons with passion began a parish-nursing program that partners with the City of Columbus Health Department. This led to a partnership with Mt. Carmel Health resulting in the creation of a primary care Health Station, operating five days a week, staffed with a physician, a nurse practitioner, and nurse. This Health Station provides quality health care and offers financial assistance to patients who do not have insurance. Various small groups promote healthy and addiction-free living including: Narcotics Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous, exercise classes and a healthy living group. In addition, there is a Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered Twelve-Step Recovery Program for anyone who is striving to overcome a hurt, habit, or hang-up. Celebrate Recovery provides a weekly dinner, worship service and small group meetings.<sup>12</sup>

The core values of the United Methodist Church for All People and Community Development for All People are:

- All people are loved by God just the way they are.
- All people are welcome.
- All people desire inclusive community.
- All people desire relevant worship.
- All people seek hope and healing.
- All people have within themselves the God-given power to improve their lives.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.4allpeople.org/> (Accessed December 2014)

- All people have gifts to give and a desire to serve.
- All people desire affirmation.
- All people are capable of being transformed by God, in and through Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

These core values are essential for extending radical hospitality to all people because God's love is deep and wide and we are all beloved children of God. United Methodist heritage is rooted in a deep and profound understanding of God's grace. This incredible grace flows from God's great love for his children. Grace is defined as the love and mercy God gives his children because God wants his children to have it, not because of anything that his children have done to earn it. Ephesians 2:8–9 (NRSV) states “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and it is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

### *Synergy*

My spiritual journey and ministry are in dynamic relationship, crystallizing the focus of his proposed research. It is a reflection on my reasons for believing and why this is my particular ministry context, in terms of pivotal points in my life; and the need(s) as identified in myself in the context of ministry. There are discussions about the changes expected and what is expected to produce in those around me. Discussion will center on how my unique spiritual journey has equipped me to address my ministry as it is situated

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

and what God desires me to do to make a difference for His people and the everlasting kingdom.

*Reasons in this Ministry Context*

Believing that God has given me a unique gift to share with His creation, a gift ripened for use by my own life challenges, I am determined to stay focus and continue to the end. Unlike many others in my situation, it is believed that my resiliency is a blessing from God. It is the ability to bounce back and continue to grow in spite of disappointments, losses, setbacks, rejections, or abandonment. The feelings of hopelessness, abandonment, guilt, shame, and loss pervade the inmate population, things experienced in ministry over the years. My father abandoned his family at a crucial time in my development. My mother became both the mother and the father, struggling to provide for her children.

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) gave me the needed skills and expertise to help many, both in the prison setting and the congregation in the parish setting. At Saint Elizabeth's Mental Hospital in Washington, D.C., basic knowledge was acquired to minister to people with mental illness and those who were incarcerated by "reason of insanity."

It was a humble experience to seek the services of a therapist to assist me deal with some serious issues in my life. It felt that people did not love me; therefore I was attempted to buy love. Like some of the men in Madison Correctional Institution, It felt that the whole world was against me. The therapist showed me practical ways to deal with the issues at hand. Finally I was able to accept other's weaknesses after discovering

my own weaknesses through therapy. The therapist made me understand that to effectively help others with their issues and problems, one must first deal with his own issues and problems. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) experience allowed me to deal with such personal issues, including:

- The inability to be confrontational
- Feelings of rejection and abandonment
- Blaming others instead of taking responsibility

However, CPE was not adequate; there was a need for a Master of Divinity degree. The Lord, again, made a way for me to attend Howard University, School of Divinity, and was blessed to graduate with a M.Div. degree.

The fact that my parents listened to us children at the dinner table, taught me how to listen to lesser people, especially those incarcerated. Sometimes, that is all the offenders need, someone to listen to them.

The mourner's bench experience helped me to get serious about God and to find real joy in church services. Church attendance became regular and much more meaningful.

To assist God in finding a way, I tutored children in the neighborhood to raise extra money. Two older men were the source of fond memories. One of them, a talented musician, offered to pay the first year of St. Patrick tuition. He then assisted in the purchase of textbooks. Showing me what it means to be radically hospitable.

God answered my prayers, to help me began to experience the power of faith. Never had to grapple with academy-induced financial crises for God always provided. This is one lesson learned which is imparted to everyone, that God will provide.

My father changed by the power of God. He came back into my life and through the power of the Holy Spirit, he was forgiven by me. This experience has enabled me to believe that if God could transform my father, with the help of God, offenders in prison can also change and be forgiven.

The hospital reassignment enabled me to see others suffering from lack of basic needs like affordable drinking water, good sanitation, satisfactory meal preparation and total lack of compassion for the patients. The offenders at the Madison Correctional Institution have similar needs and suffer from these basic needs, as well.

The death of my mother was another pivotal point in my spiritual journey. Her death hurt me the most. My mother had been so good to me and had made so many sacrifices for me, yet when she died it was not possible to contribute to the burial expenses. When my father died, it was no problem. All the burial expenses were paid by me. When death notices were given to offenders at Madison Correctional Institution, there were some who expressed how well their parents were, and because of their current circumstances, they could not contribute to the burial expenses. The offenders expressed their feelings of frustration and hurt.

The Missouri prison job was the only one available at the time. Was this a coincidence or what? Why another job was not found, or doing something somewhere else? This was a maximum-security institution and it was very dangerous. The men at this prison were there for life and had committed some of the most hideous crimes in the state. Each day there were stabbings and fights among the inmates and against the staff. It was God who protected me during my tenure at Jefferson City Correctional Center. One day, two non-Islamic inmates had infiltrated the Islamic services and lured a young female

correctional officer, who was new at the chapel, to open a closet door that only the chaplain should open. When she opened that door, the two inmates pushed her inside the closet and assaulted her. She received a broken skull from a hit to the head with a flashlight. After this incident, it was time to ask God to find me another place to work.

God found a place—the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. For six and half years God had me at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, Ohio. I was later transferred to the Madison Correctional Institution in London, Ohio, serving as a staff chaplain until October, 2014 when heart health problems forced me to retire.

#### *Why in this Particular Ministry Context?*

Apparently, my childhood and background have led to my desire to help change the lives of men and women, to give them a fresh start. Through the many struggles, adversities, hardships, rejections, heartbreaks, disappointments, and losses, I remained determined to move forward, trusting in God. My resilience to persevere in the midst of all the challenges of my life is a true testimony of my strong faith in God. This process began with my mother, teaching and modeling God's prevenient grace and how to trust God for the impossible.

According to Wesley, prevenient grace is:

(To come before)—that God's action, not ours, is the beginning of the process of salvation, followed by the necessity of our response. Wesley believed that God's universal offer of salvation was analogous to natural conscience whereby everyone knows the difference between good and evil. However, Wesley said that such discerning ability was not natural but the result of God's enlightenment in every person's mind. Thus, we are enabled by God to respond freely in one of two ways—respond positively and accept this distinction between good and evil, realizing that we must repent of our sinful ways, or respond negatively, reject such knowledge, and continue in our sinful ways.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Green. *The Wesley Study Bible*, 605.



God made it possible for me to connect with the patients at the psychiatric hospital when I did not want to be there. Those patients had a need to be healed and not to be treated inhumanely. Those patients were the victims of neglect, losses, and rejections just like me.

The loss of the first love of my life was painful. The loss of my father, who had abandoned his family, and then came back into my life, was hurtful. Then there was the loss of the uncle who raised me. The most hurtful of all was the loss of my mother, who instilled in me the habit of trusting God for everything in life.

Counseling and conversations with the men and women in prison, allowed me to know that they too have experienced such losses. Like me they blame other people and circumstances for the problems in their lives.

It is time to move forward and by the grace of God and under the guidance of God, I will continue to travel the paths God has for me. God has been too good to me. Coming from a family that knew poverty, but being big on giving alms to needy, twice a week an offering was collected at the mid-week and Sunday worship services at Madison Correctional Institution. The offerings of commissary items (food and hygiene) were given to the local women shelter. God has blessed me to be equipped with skills and expertise to be involved in preparing offenders to re-enter society through a faith-based re-entry program. There is growing awareness that a spiritual foundation can play a significant role in meeting the needs of the offenders. This is evidenced by the federal government's willingness to fund some faith based programs that attempt to tackle the problem of recidivism. The director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and

Corrections has mandated through the three-tier restructuring plan that all thirty-two Ohio prisons operate a faith-based program. Madison Correction Institution is one of them.

My spiritual journey has led me to the focus group of pastoral care and counseling because of the experiences in the past. My parents were teachers and became a teacher. However, with some disappointment while teaching had to move on to another profession. My parents also changed careers. From conversations with offenders, many have changed careers and felt disappointed. The abandonment, disappointment, rejection, loss and dejection experienced were painful, yet meaningful. God allowed me to go through those experiences to prepare me for the task at hand. The offenders in the Madison Correctional Institution are experiencing the same feelings of abandonment, disappointment and rejection. How God dealt with me to become an over-comer will be the same for my congregation. It was only by the grace of God! It is my mission to provide pastoral care and counseling to all marginalized people of God, the same way the people in my life offered care and support to me. As a chaplain/pastor, God called and equipped me to feed the Lord's sheep—the world is my parish, as Wesley said:

I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it ... my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation.<sup>15</sup>

Some changes this project seeks to produce in offenders in and out of prison are:

- To help them access their personal strengths and weaknesses
- To help them rebuild damaged relationships
- To help them develop communities of support—a faith community can serve this role well

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<sup>15</sup> <http://clayjarspeaking.wordpress.com/2011/02/07/john-wesley-the-world-is-my-parish> (Accessed January 15, 2013).

- To help them change their thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT**

The problem of recidivism is a complex issue for federal and state institutions as well as to all communities to which African-American male ex-offenders return. As a prison chaplain, it is my belief that this study and its outcomes can help transform the lives of African-American male ex-offenders when they are released from prison. Most importantly, the ex-offender must be willing to accept support from the Christian community after they are released to assist them through the process.

Migrating to the United States as an exile from war-torn Liberia, West Africa, It is understandable how an African-American male ex-offender feels when he is released from prison and is not welcomed by the Christian community. Upon arrival in the U. S., if it had not been for the Christian communities offering radical hospitality to me, it would have been very difficult to survive. It was The United Methodist Church in Maryland that whole-heartedly embraced me and extended radical hospitality. It is important for the church's leadership to understand the *modus operandi* of the prison system when it comes to returning citizens.

Prisons have undergone transformations throughout centuries, yet that transformation seems to elude ex-offenders as recidivism is still high in the United States.

My purpose was to develop, and evaluate the implementation of a training manual for church leadership, using the concept of radical hospitality as a tool to address the high

recidivism rate of African-American male ex-offenders in the Columbus, Ohio area.

Radical hospitality is going above and beyond the normal way of welcoming and entertaining the stranger. It is loving others and developing a relationship into the family of Christ. United Methodist Bishop Schnase has made this concept of radical hospitality famous, and deservedly so. Radical hospitality is not only offering a visitor coffee and donuts. It is not a greeter at the door. It is an orientation of our being that sees everyone as a valued guest.

Although the moral and theological importance of hospitality was largely overlooked for centuries, hospitality was an important moral category in ancient societies.<sup>1</sup> The main paradigm of hospitality is centered on the concept of gift—more specifically, the “gift of welcome to others.” For example, ancient Greeks regarded hospitality as a basic characteristic that distinguished their society from the primitive type, which was marked by xenophobia or fear of strangers and foreigners<sup>2</sup>. The need for the protection of strangers is also commonly found in the oldest ancient Greek literature. Both humans and gods were depicted as seeking and receiving welcome. Theo xenia (divine visitation) could be found throughout Greek literature.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Christine D. Pohl writes in her article, “Responding to Strangers: Insights from the Christian Tradition,” that hospitality was largely ignored in Britain in the previous several centuries. Citing Henri J. M. Nouwen’s *Reaching Out*, Pohl also claims that, “from the nineteenth century onwards, [hospitality] was increasingly viewed as equivalent to pleasant tea parties and cozy get-togethers” (Pohl 2006, 82). Pohl’s description is echoed by Felicity Heal’s in-depth research on the idea of hospitality in early modern England. According to Heal, “it is impossible to read early modern texts without attaching the prefix ‘decay of’ to the notion of hospitality, for it was firmly held that the English had fallen from some previous standard of domestic excellence” (Heal 1984, 80.)

<sup>2</sup> Ladislaus J. Bolchazy, *Hospitality in Early Rome: Livy’s Concept of Its Humanizing Force*. (Chicago: Ares Publishers. 1977). 1.

<sup>3</sup> Adelbert Denaus, “The Theme of Divine Visits and Human Hospitality in Luke-Acts: Its Old Testament and Graeco-Roman Antecedents.” *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, edited by J. Verheyden, 255-80 (Leuven: Leuven University Press. 1999). 363.

Just as in Greek society, Roman culture recognized hospitality as an important social virtue of civilization and as a privilege of patrons. For example, *ius hospitii* (the law of hospitality) was established in connection with the seven categories of relationships. The seven categories of relationships are as follows: the “avoidance or mistreatment of strangers,” the “apotropanic category,” the “Medea category,” the “theoxenic category,” the “*ius hospitii, ius dei* category,” the “contractual category,” and the “altruistic category.”

According to Ladislaus Bolchazy, “the *ius hospitii* brought Romans from magico-religious xenophobia to altruism”<sup>4</sup> with its emphasis on the kind treatment of a stranger and the brotherhood/sisterhood among people, the *ius hospitii* also paved the way for the reception of the more advanced and reasoned teachings of Stoicism and Christianity. Roman philosophers such as Cicero and Seneca, for example, supported the *itus hospitii* and endorsed the sacred duty of hospitality by arguing for the brotherhood/sisterhood of people and love for the human race. From their perspective to do harm to a fellow human being or to deny foreigners their rights would be tantamount to bringing damage to the structure of civil society.<sup>5</sup>

Greek and Roman views of hospitality were, however, largely characterized by their emphasis on formal reciprocal obligations between the givers of hospitality and its receivers since “a grateful response from the beneficiary was key to the ongoing

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<sup>4</sup> Bolchazy, 1-15, 35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 35-36.

relationship, the tradition emphasized the worthiness and goodness of recipients rather than their need.”<sup>6</sup>

As Amy G. Oden writes, the early Christian tradition has much to say about hospitality, both as an essential virtue and as an important practice. Although hospitality is largely known as the welcoming of the stranger, Oden insists that “the meaning of hospitality within the Christian biblical and historical traditions have focused on receiving the alien and extending one’s resources to them.”<sup>7</sup>

Compared to the contemporary Greek and Roman kinds, Pohl argues that the distinctive quality of Christian hospitality lies in the ethos that “offers a generous welcome to the ‘least’ without concern for advantage or benefit to the host.”<sup>8</sup> Why, then, did the early Christians communities develop this quality?

The first reason for this phenomenon can be found in biblical teachings. It is reasonable for us to imagine that the preachers of the early Christian church exhorted its believers to practice hospitality in a way that followed the model provided by cases in the Old Testament (namely, in texts such as Genesis 18). As is well known, Abraham here offers hospitality and refreshment to three messengers of God by receiving the strangers under the oaks of Mamre even though they are unknown to him. In New Testament texts, Luke 14 and Matthew 25, we can find an even more direct instruction that Jesus himself conveyed.

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<sup>6</sup> Christine D. Pohl. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1999). 18.

<sup>7</sup> Amy G. Oden, ed. *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press. 2001). 13 – 14

<sup>8</sup> Pohl, 16.

Jesus states in Matthew 25:34-36:

Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

In line with this passage in the New Testament, Christine D. Pohl rightly points out that the entire tradition of Christian hospitality has been marked by this distinctive type of offering welcome to strangers, thereby connecting Jesus' own identification with "the least of these" and a general hospitality toward human beings with a care for Jesus himself.<sup>9</sup>

Another reason for the distinctive quality of Christian hospitality can be examined from the historical context of the early Christian church. According to Oden, due to the political and social oppression experienced by the early Christians, they could understandably develop a sense of identification with exiles and refugees. "Because Christians were at times under threat from civil authorities, the act of harboring refugees who were brothers and sisters in Christ became imperative. Sheltering strangers was essential to the survival of Christianity in a hostile empire."<sup>10</sup> As a result of the adaptation to this historical context, the early Christian community developed its own distinctive quality of hospitality in contrast to its Greek and Roman counterparts, who associated hospitality with benefit and reciprocity. Christian hospitality results in reciprocity without the one offering hospitality seeking any return. As Oden points out, the significance of this difference lies in the profound conviction of early Christian voices

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<sup>9</sup> Pohl, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Oden, 38.



that Christian identity is deeply rooted in otherness.<sup>11</sup> Having this type of identity also means that one's own awareness of marginal positions—cultivated through identification with the poor and the social outcast—becomes an indispensable condition for offering true hospitality.

In order to embrace the otherness of strangers, the reduction of political, economic, and cultural privileges are necessary on the part of the hosting citizens. The need for such a reduction certainly makes radical hospitality impossible to complete. Kosuke Koyama powerfully links radical hospitality to “martyrdom,” suggesting that “the way of extending hospitality to the stranger may even become the way toward martyrdom.”<sup>12</sup> According to Koyama, Jesus was crucified because he completely extended hospitality to strangers; moreover, martyrs such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Steve Biko, and Oscar Romero suffered martyrdom following Christ's hospitality to strangers.

Lisa Isherwood and David Harris in *Radical Otherness-Sociological and Theological Approaches*, stated how social theory can illuminate many contemporary issues in theology, while the examination of theological methods can shed light on problematic issues in sociology. According to them, the problem of otherness is central to debate in both the social sciences and theology. To define the other – by color, gender, politics, nationality, or religion – is to define the self. Othering has been used through

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<sup>11</sup> Oden, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Kosuke Koyama, “Extended Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of Theologia Crucis.” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 20.3: -76. 2006.166.

history as a justification for boundary-setting, for conflict and for oppression. Regarding such martyrdom, what we need to see is that Jesus himself was a stranger.<sup>13</sup>

The term hospitality describes a state of generosity, accommodation, and consideration towards others. When the practice is intentional it will become embedded in your lifestyle. This adherence is reached when you consider hospitality as a biblical and moral obligation, where every encounter with the other will be viewed through the lens of hospitableness. Fortunately, humanity always moves from host/stranger to stranger/host. In Christian theology, the giver and receivers are one of equal regard. Since there are no permanent positions in life, persons are always moving in and out of situations where they sometimes experience being the host, and other times the stranger. According to author Freddy James Clark, hospitality becomes the means by which equal regard and moral obligation are exercised and that proclamation is the tool that shapes the practice to develop a committed relationship with hospitality.<sup>14</sup>

Christian hospitality is more than a well-set table, pleasant conversation, or even inviting people into your home. Christian hospitality, according to Elizabeth Newman, is an extension of how we interact with God. It trains us to be capable of welcoming strangers who will challenge us and enhance our lives in unexpected ways, readying us to embrace the ultimate stranger: God. In *Untamed Hospitality*, Newman dispels the modern myths of hospitality as a superficial commodity that can be bought and sold at The Pottery Barn and restores it to its proper place within the story of God, as displayed most

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<sup>13</sup> Lisa Isherwood and David Harris, *Radical Otherness: Sociological and Theological Approaches*, Gender, Theology and Spirituality (London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Freddy James Clark, *Hospitality: An Ecclesiological Practice of Ministry* (Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Books, 2007), 1-82.

fully in Jesus Christ. Worship, she says, is the participation of the believer in divine hospitality, a hospitality that cannot be sequestered from our economic, political, or public lives.<sup>15</sup>

The U.S. immigration debate has raised some of the most difficult questions our nation has ever faced: How can we preserve the integrity of sovereign borders while also respecting the dignity of human beings? And how should we regard “the stranger” in our midst?

To understand the experience of those directly impacted by the immigration crisis, Amanda Rose traveled to the Sonoran desert, a border region where the remains of some 2,000 migrants have been recovered over the past decade. There she interviewed minutemen, border agents, Catholic nuns, humanitarian aid workers, left-wing protestors, ranchers, and many other ordinary citizens of southern Arizona. She discovers two starkly opposed ideological perspectives: those of religious activists who embrace a biblically inspired hospitality that stresses love of strangers and a “borderless” compassion; and that of law enforcement, which insists on safety, security, and strict respect for international borders. But by embracing the stories these people tell about their life experience – whether the rancher angered over seeing his property damaged by trespassing migrants, or the migrant who has left three children behind in a violent shantytown in the hope of providing them a better life through southbound remittances, or the border patrol agent stuck between his loyalties to law and the pain of finding a baby girl dead in the desert, Rose takes us beyond predictable and entrenched partisan views to offer a more nuanced

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Pub. Group, 2007), 1.

portrait of the conflict on the border. Ultimately, she argues, the immigration question turns on how we choose to view “the other” with compassion or with fear.<sup>16</sup>

In conversation with a post-911 America overcome with fear and increasingly wary of the stranger, Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt offer an alternative response rooted in Benedictine monasticism. Homan, a Benedictine monk of the monastery of St. Benedict in Oxford, Michigan, and Collins Pratt, a friend of the monastery, “propose that hospitality is ground zero in the struggle for our post-modern, post 911, post-post souls. Their invitation to undertake this way promises not the quick fixes of a “Chocolate Jesus” who satisfies our ever craving, but a life rooted in the difficult and rewarding practice of greeting the strangers among us and embracing the foreign places residing in our own hearts.”<sup>17</sup>

Homan and Pratt indicated that hospitality might seem like a weak, even quirky recommendation for spiritual renewal in a world beset by uncertainty, tumult, and terror. After all, in American society hospitality has come to mean mints on pillows and instant customer satisfaction. As they comment, “the missing virtue of our era has been turned into a social grace that neither disturbs nor transforms.”<sup>18</sup>

Far more than proper table manners or correct dining attire, Homan and Collins Pratt remind us that hospitality rests at the heart of the command of Jesus to love one another and his practice of table-fellowship. They offer not a new spirituality, a new practice, to assuage our consumer passions, but the same old challenge of the gospel to

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<sup>16</sup> Ananda Rose, *Showdown in the Sonoran Desert: Religion, Law, and the Immigration Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, ©2012), 1-208.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2002), xxxviii + 233.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 13.

break every barrier down by choosing to relate to those God brings into our daily lives. “Here is the core of hospitality: May I know you better? Will you come closer, please? No it will not be easy, but make no mistake about it, your life depends on this saying stranger coming to you and stretching your tight little heart”.<sup>19</sup> Our hearts and attitudes must be centered on the teachings and practices of Jesus Christ as recorded in Holy Scriptures. There are several re-entry programs that are centered on the teachings and practices of Jesus Christ to integrate offenders into the community; however, this project is unique in that it is founded on the principle of radical hospitality to African-American male ex-offenders.

### *RISE*

The office of the Mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania established the Reintegration Services (RISE) utilizing direct services and partnerships with other agencies to successfully reintegrate the formerly incarcerated back into their communities. RISE recognizes that those that receive the skills, training and education necessary to compete in the formal economy are far less likely to participate in criminal activity.

RISE aims to improve public safety while also assisting the formerly incarcerated in becoming responsible and productive Philadelphians by addressing barriers that impede their chances for success. RISE has established the following goals:

- Act as an umbrella organization for re-entry programs and initiative for returning citizens
- Establish a strong network of partner organizations to promote community-wide collaboration in re-entry.

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<sup>19</sup> Homan and Collins Pratt, 36.

- Create programming and training that best suits the needs of returning citizens
- Provide returning citizens with the skills, knowledge and resources to obtain and retain employment

Philadelphia's Mayor is committed to helping these individuals and assisting the businesses and non-profits that offer them chances to prove themselves. The City of Philadelphia wants to partner with the private and non-profit sectors to make the process of hiring these dedicated individuals as easy as possible.

RISE is the lead agency in the City for the management of reintegration services for returning citizens back into society. Each year thousands of people are released from state, local and federal detention centers back into Philadelphia, making the successful reintegration of returning citizens (juvenile and adult) the single most important workforce and public safety issue of the region. Two-thirds of these will commit new crimes and return to prison within three years without serious intervention. This creates a cycle of release and recidivism that is both devastating and costly to the economic growth, community and government resources of Philadelphia.<sup>20</sup>

Any individual who contacts RISE seeking services is likely motivated. They want to break the revolving door of recidivism and remake their lives to become productive members of society. At RISE, they are assessed, and it is determined which of the partners can help them take that first step toward employment. RISE's partners range from transitional work organizations, placement agencies, and job training centers, life coaches and others.

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<sup>20</sup>Mayor's Office of Reintegration Services (Rise) Why Hire a Formerly Incarcerated Individuals? <http://rise.phila.gov/why-http://rise.phila.gov/about-rise/-a-formerly-incarcerated-individual/> (Accessed December 18, 2014).

### *The Beatitudes Society*

The Beatitudes Society is another national leadership development organization that identifies resources and connects young entrepreneurial faith leaders who are creating new models for vibrant church life and the pursuit of social justice. The society is identified as progressive Christians, committed to the welcoming and inclusive love of God expressed in the words and actions of Jesus; they are Christian at their roots and multi-faith in reaching out to the community.

The Beatitudes Society, founded in 2005, identifies and equips emerging leaders to grow progressive Christian faith communities for the sake of justice and the common good. It is the vision of the Beatitudes Society to have a network of progressive Christian faith leaders to be visible, be able to articulate and be an influential force for justice, compassion, inclusion and peace in the public square. One day Christianity will be known as a force for good, a small group of social justice advocates convened to bring a new generation of progressive Christian voices to the public dialogue.

They saw that Christianity was widely perceived as intolerant and exclusive (and still is), and they envisioned a day when Christianity might be known for the kind of values expressed in the Beatitudes of Jesus, found in Matthew's version of the Jesus story (5:1-12): "blessed are the poor . . . the meek . . . the merciful . . . the Peacemakers . . ."<sup>21</sup>

The Beatitudes Society has been equipping emerging leaders with the tools that deepen their capacity for social justice advocacy, hone their preaching and teaching voices, and strengthens their sustaining spiritual practices. It was noticed that the Beatitudes Society has refined its leadership development program over the years and

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<sup>21</sup><http://www.beatitudessociety.org/> (Accessed December 21, 2013)

now offers a yearlong Beatitudes Fellowship for a select group of emerging entrepreneurial leaders--resilient, spiritually-alive, risk-taking leaders of deep integrity who will shape and build progressive Christian communities in the twenty-first century.<sup>22</sup>

### *Corrections 2 Community*

The Corrections 2 Community organization (C2C) envisions a just society where returning citizens have the opportunity to contribute to and participate in their community after having served their sentence. This organization envisions a place where those formerly incarcerated are empowered to overcome prior obstacles to lead productive healthy lives.

It is the mission of C2C to guide each individual from inside the prison system through the release process, and back into their receiving community; offering direct services and partnerships with other agencies to successfully reintegrate each individual according to their needs and geographic area. C2C recognizes that those who receive the skills, training, education, and support necessary to compete in the formal economy is far less likely to recidivate.

C2C operates programs that seek collaborations, and raise funds with strict adherence to the following set of values:

- Integrity
- Social Justice
- Economic Justice
- Humanity
- Diversity

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<sup>22</sup><http://www.beatitudessociety.org/> (Accessed December 21, 2013)



- Compassion
- Competence

It was reported that the aim to address barriers that impede the formerly incarcerated in their chances for success upon their release would be by:

- Creating programming and training that best suits the needs of returning citizens
- Partnering with the Department of Corrections to maximize efforts
- Partnering with private corporations willing to support ex-offenders
- Partnering with non-profit organizations with complementary missions
- Providing returning citizens with the skills, knowledge and resources to obtain and retain employment
- Addressing basic needs prior to release to reduce the stress of homelessness and destitution upon re-entry
- Continuing to address basic post-release needs
- Coordinating with local health, education, and social services upon release
- Establishing brick and mortar centers in key markets, with case managers, advocates, individual counselors, a career center, and a group work room at each site
- Conducting rigorous research surrounding best practices in re-entry. Contributing to the changing dialogue around ex-offenders in the United States<sup>23</sup>

### *Kairos Prison Ministry*

Research proves the most effective ministries to offenders combine evangelism, discipleship and mentoring. Kairos has figured out these interventions are important not only inside but outside the prison walls.

Dr. Byron Johnson

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.corrections2community.org/#!/about-us/cjg9> (Accessed December 10, 2014)

The slogan of Kairos is embedded in the following words:

***Changing Hearts, Transforming Lives, Impacting the World***

*Changing Hearts*

During the initial Kairos weekend, Kairos volunteers serve as the instrument of God through which His love, grace and mercy are expressed to the participants/guests in a real and profound way. God begins changing hearts.

*Transforming Lives*

After their weekend experience, participants/guests are encouraged to take responsibility for their life choices and their relations with God; they are invited to engage in small accountability groups. Kairos volunteers continue to return monthly for a reunion to provide mentoring and guidance through these accountability groups. It is here that Kairos participants/guests begin to replace old ways of thinking with new and they learn they are not alone on this journey. They realize there is a hope for a future. The prison environment begins to change; family relationships start to heal . . . God is transforming lives.

*Impacting the World*

As a chaplain, supervising a Kairos weekend, it was amazing to observe the Kairos community inside a prison grow and begin to gain influence, and the incidences of violence decreases. Incarcerated participants who are released re-enter the outside world with a God centered, perspective and focus on becoming productive citizens. Female

family members find support, strength and encouragement. Youthful offenders acquire new God centered values and change their direction in life. Families are reunited with a hope for the future.<sup>24</sup>

The mission of the Kairos Prison Ministry is to share the transforming love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ to impact the hearts and lives of incarcerated men, women and youth, as well as their families, to become loving and productive citizens of their communities.

Kairos Prison Ministry is an ecumenical Christian ministry. Kairos of Ohio operates as an affiliate of Kairos Prison Ministry, Inc. which governs with a national Board of Directors. Ohio Kairos operates three major ministries: (1) Kairos (the oldest and main ministry); (2) Kairos Outside, and (3) Torch. The mission of Kairos is to help grow and nurture strong Christian communities within state and federal correctional institutions.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.corrections2community.org/#!/about-us/cjg9> (Accessed December 10, 2014)

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

#### *Historical Foundation*

The impact of incarceration on ex-offenders, who are “returning citizens,” has caused some Christian communities to become healing communities, and receiving stations of hope in the interest of reducing recidivism among ex-offenders. Ex-offenders are citizens who have been convicted of a criminal offense and sentenced to serve time in prison. After serving their time, these ex-offenders are expected to return to their communities and become productive citizens. Rooted in an Armenian/Wesleyan belief through which we identify with Christ, we are all “returning citizens.”

The purpose of this writing is to highlight the role(s) that Christian communities have played historically, in addressing the needs of ex-offenders who require re-acclimating into communities, especially healing communities upon their release from prison. The paper will discuss the history of prison and, the roots and fruits of Christian hospitality. In addition, it will investigate radical hospitality from a United Methodist perspective. This will show the importance of a Christian church having a ministry of integrating African-American ex-offender males back into society.

Prisoners and ex-offenders have a special place in the Christian imagination. It matters that Jesus himself was a prisoner. To communicate in today’s language of American law enforcement; Jesus’ death was a death while in custody. His most

influential followers, Peter and Paul, were also prisoners, both of whom died in custody. John the Baptist, who first acclaimed Jesus as Messiah, was beheaded in a Roman prison. One may therefore hypothesize that Christianity is a religion founded by people who got into deep trouble with the law, people familiar with the inside of prisons.

Dr. Harold Dean Trulear of the Howard University School of Divinity emphasizes that healing communities are actually balancing justice with mercy. This allows them to experience greater personal integration, following God's example of being simultaneously just and merciful. He argues that the Christian community can transcend judgment while balancing justice and mercy when it is a healing community because it is not mired in the past but is working to better the future. Trulear contends that Christian communities can offer what no secular program or agency can do—provide a place where non-judgment, acceptance, love, caring, forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption and restoration can occur. Therefore, the healing communities' model seeks to engage congregations in helping people in their own congregations affected by crime and incarceration.<sup>1</sup>

### *Role(s) of the Christian Communities*

Faith communities can play a unique role in healing individuals, families and communities divested by crime and cycles of incarceration. They can help build a community consensus around the challenges facing families with an incarcerated loved one, as well as the individuals returning home from incarceration. Houses of worship can

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<sup>1</sup>On April 29-30, 2013, Dr. Harold Dean Trulear spoke at the American Correctional Chaplains Association (ACCA), East Central Region.

serve as resources for transforming neighborhoods into places where family and social support as available to people affected by crime and incarceration.<sup>2</sup>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation refers to these places as “Healing Communities”—places where loving, healthy relationships of support exist, and values of forgiveness and reconciliation, together with commitment to redemption, can be shared. Houses of worship can serve as catalysts that facilitate the transformation of surrounding neighborhoods into Healing Communities. Because of the values of forgiveness and reconciliation, Healing Communities reject the stigma and shame associated with incarceration, and provides individuals and families with social networks to ensure their continued membership in the neighborhood, as well as restore those to the community who have left it. The individuals that come home to the neighborhood following prison are welcomed and belong to the family and social network. Rather than simply focusing on re-entry as the return of ex-offenders from prison, Healing Communities embrace the concept of “reintegration,” so community acceptance becomes the norm. And for those who had been cast as outsiders even before incarceration, Healing Communities offer “integration”—integration into the body of the family, congregation, work force and neighborhood.<sup>3</sup>

Healing Communities have historically been entrusted to church elders.

According to Dr. Earl D. Hudson, Sr.:

The Christian church has a long history of concern for the welfare of prisoners. From the beginning of the church, deacons and deaconesses were responsible for the care of those incarcerated. Their mission was to provide food, clothing, money and religion. It was also customary for bishops to purchase the freedom of

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<sup>2</sup> Healing Communities: *A Framework for Congregations in Their Ministry to Families Affected by Incarceration*, (the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD 2010).1-17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 18.

prisoners. However these activities should not be viewed as a ‘get out of jail free’ card. Generally the crime for which the prisoner was being punished involved a sin. The church could not and would not overlook that but rather chose to free the prisoner, punish them and correct them so the sin would not be repeated.”<sup>4</sup>

Churches are still in the business of restoring broken relationships. Dr. Earl D. Hudson, Sr., discusses in his doctor of ministry dissertation the need to accept ex-offenders into the Christian community, especially when they are released from prison. However, his emphasis is not on radical hospitality. Dr. Hudson contends that the church “must work collaboratively with the prison system in order to offer inmates the opportunity to restore their relationship with God.”<sup>5</sup>

Hudson asserts that the prisoner being set free from prison is similar to our being set free from sin. Not forgiving the prisoner is as bad as someone not willing to forgive us of our sins as we seek a church home. There is a need to accept all who call on the name of Christ into our churches, including the vilest offenders. Not only that, but if Christians are to follow the great commission, they are commanded to seek out these individuals.<sup>6</sup> Hudson further argues that the work of forgiveness and reconciliation begins in the prison and continues once the inmate has been released. To begin the work of reconciliation in the prison setting and subsequently not offer a welcoming faith community upon release from prison is perhaps the greatest sin of all. “In 1967 the National Council of Churches issued a resolution calling for churches to aid inmates being released by establishing half way houses and accepting them into the Christian community.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Earl D. Hudson, Sr., “*Re-Entry: Preparing The Local Church To Provide A Healthy Start To Recently Released Prisoners*” (D.Min. Diss., United Theological Seminary, 2007), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 52, 53

The Christian church was established as an instrument through which people could reconcile with God. Tyron Inbody argues that the church “does not have a mission but rather is a mission.” Therefore, if this is correct, then the church must work to help restore the relationship between God and the sinner—becoming “reconciling communities.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ did not have a mission; he was and is a mission.

### *American Prison History*

Gordon L. Heath, elaborating on the love for neighbor (Matthew 22:34-50), cites George Marsden who asserts that the love of neighbor requires a study of history:

The basic reason why we who are Christians should teach and learn history is so that we may better understand ourselves and our fellow human being in relation to our own culture and to the world. Since the Christian’s task is to live in this world and to witness to the love of God as manifested in Christ, it is essential for us to understand ourselves and the world as best we can. Love is the Christian’s central obligation, and understanding is an essential ingredient in love. If we are going to love others, it seems evident that we should try our best to understand them<sup>9</sup>.

According to Heath, it may be too much to say that a lack of interest in the past is an indication of a lack of love for others, but it is probably fair to say that it is difficult to grow in love for others without knowing their past.<sup>10</sup> The truth of the Christian faith is intimately tied to events in human history. God has acted in a very real way in the course of human history (no event = no Christianity), therefore, the church has a vested interest in historical events.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hudson, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon L. Heath, *Doing Church History: A User-Friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity* (Toronto, Ontario: Clements Publishing, 2008), 22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 23.



From their origins in the early nineteenth century, prisons were primarily intended to house populations who were poor, unskilled, unemployed, and judged to be in need of social and moral instruction and discipline. For some, prison evokes stark images; forbidding walls spiked with watch towers (razor-barbed wires); inmates confined to cramped cells for hours on end; and the suspicious eyes of armed guards. These images seem to be the inevitable and permanent marks of confinement, as though the prison were a timeless institution stretching from the age of stone dungeons to the current era of steel boxes. But centuries of development and debate lie behind the prison as we now know it—a rich history that reveals how our ideas of crime and practices of punishment have changed over time.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1830s prisons were organized around the principles of order and regularity and hence isolated each prisoner in a cell and enforced rules of total silence. By the early 1900s the institutions modeled themselves on the outside community, affording inmates the opportunity to mix in the yard and work groups; the prison thus became a testing ground for judging readiness for release. All the while, over the course of the nineteenth century prisons began to specialize, so that juveniles entered one type of institution, women another, the mentally ill still another. The process continued into the twentieth century, with inmates eventually confined to minimum, medium-maximum, or lately, maximum-maximum security prisons according to the severity of their offense and the extent of their criminal record. But, why the prison?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Norval Morris and David J Rothman, eds., *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1-250.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. ix.

According to authors Norval Morris and David Rothman, the conventional contemporary answer to “Why the prison?” includes the desire to deter crime, to express society’s urge for retribution, and to reform the deviant; but adds as well the desire to incapacitate dangerous criminals. Accordingly, the prison system answers the question: “why the prison?” with the following principal goals:

- Keep prisoners in custody
- Maintain order, control, discipline and safe environment
- Provide decent conditions for prisoners and meet their needs, including health care
- Provide positive regimes which help prisoners address their offending behavior and allow them as full and responsible a life as possible
- Help prisoners prepare for their return to the community.<sup>14</sup>

The reformatory movement of the 1870s —as advanced in the 1870 Congress or as administered in the state reformatories—did little to stop the deterioration of the country’s prisons. Most prisons continued a dreary life of their own, unaffected by the ambitious proposals of the new reformers. Brutality and corruption were endemic; overcrowding and understaffing were also omnipresent. In such chaotic prison atmospheres, wardens often resorted to cruel and unusual forms of punishment to maintain their authority over the convicts. There were some changes in the administration of prison after 1870. A number of states, including New York and Massachusetts centralized prison oversight through statewide commissions. Better methods of prisoner identification lent some weight to expanding parole on release. There was more use of grades and incentives to control behavior, with greater reliance on “good time” laws, which reduce, even if only slightly, the length of terms for obedient inmates. There was

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<sup>14</sup> Morris and Rothman, xi.

also some greater specialization among prisons. But these advances were too modest when compared with the inadequacies that remained.<sup>15</sup>

Morris and Rothman point to the history of American prisons in the southern states as a glaring case in point. These institutions, in which blacks made up more than seventy-five percent of the inmates, took their inspiration from slavery. The result was a ruthless exploitation with a total disregard for prisoners' dignity and lives. During the day, these prisoners were leased to entrepreneurs, who had no ownership interest in them. Black prisoners were exploited even worse than slaves. They were organized into chain gangs under the watch of armed (white) guards, as typically they built and repaired roads. In the southwestern states, prisoners were more commonly used on large farms or plantations. In Mississippi practically all inmates were engaged in agricultural work. All the prisons were surrounded by barbed-wire fences dotted with strategically placed guard posts. The buildings that housed the convicts in each camp were appropriately called cages.<sup>16</sup>

Samuel Gridley Howe, a leading American philanthropist and prison reformer, in 1865 warned, "institutions . . . so strongly built, so richly endowed . . . cannot be got rid of so easily." He was correct because the prison reforms made prior to 1865 became a failure. The basic belief that prisons were the most effective means for reacting against crime led to excessive institutionalization and to endemic overcrowding. Indeed, overcrowding became a prevailing feature of the history of American prisons. One hundred years after Howe's warning, the Task Force Report of the President's

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<sup>15</sup> Morris and Rothman, 175.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 176.

Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice denounced the excessive reliance on imprisonment in the United States. As a result of this unchecked trend, the U. S. rate of incarceration today is the highest in the world.<sup>17</sup>

The progressive aspiration to individualize and democratize the prison resulted in the abolishment of practices such as the lockstep and striped uniforms. This aspiration also motivated changes such as the introduction of bands, orchestras, sports, exercise, and movies. But the overall progressive goals of modeling the prison on the community and transforming the prison into a treatment institution basically failed. Psychiatrists were unable to move beyond diagnosis; the quality of prison life remained subordinated to the prevalent custodial aim. The priority given to institutional order, discipline, and security reduced true rehabilitative efforts to a few insufficient and scattered attempts.<sup>18</sup>

Prison life was ultimately profoundly changed by technological advance in the fields of housing, sanitation, plumbing, and ventilation. An example of this impact came in the form of the introduction into prison cells at the turn of the century the first toilets with running water, to replace the sordid and anti-hygienic buckets. These toilets were installed for the first time in Maryland, in 1899. However, in 1990 most prisons were still using the bucket system, which was a major cause of the rampant spread of diseases throughout the prison population. During the 1960s, standards of housing and sanitary conditions became the subject of constitutional litigation and statutory recognition.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Morris and Rothman, 195.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 196.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 195.

Recreation is another significant practice introduced in the American prisons since the late nineteenth century. High levels of overcrowding plus the idleness resulting from the reduction of prison industries created an acute need for recreational activities as an incentive to maintain order and discipline. The main recreational activities were first the slowly growing libraries, orchestras, organized sports, and what was called the freedom of the yard. Sunday morning services were also regarded as a relief from the boredom of incarceration. Later, movies and television became important elements in breaking the monotony of prison life. There have also been numerous efforts to open the prison to the community, to create a series of alternatives to imprisonment, to improve medical and psychological treatment, and to rehabilitate inmates.<sup>20</sup>

The impact of accreditation and the courts has played a major role in regulating reforms in the prison environment. The American Correctional Association (ACA) is a voluntary organization of those working in correctional programs, adult and juvenile, institutional and community-based. With over twenty-four thousand members in 1992, it has considerable influence on correctional legislation and practice. Following the example of hospital accreditation programs, in 1974 the ACA established a correctional institution accreditation program, which has defined acceptable standards for prison conditions and programs and has assisted correctional administrators in meeting them. Accreditation has assisted prison administrators in attracting funds to improve prison conditions; but the courts, mostly the federal district courts, have achieved a larger effect. Federal court orders mandating the reduction of prison populations or the improvement of

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<sup>20</sup> Morris and Rothman, 196.

conditions enable administrators to make their institutions safer and fairer places for both prisoners and staff.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality*

*Philoxenia*, in Greek literally means love of the stranger. It combines the general word for love for people who are connected to us (*phileo*) with the word for stranger (*xenos*), reminding us that hospitality is always “closely connected to love.”<sup>22</sup> However, the word *xenos* has other meanings—in addition to “stranger,” it also means “guest” and “host.”<sup>23</sup> Author Henry Brinton suggests that Jesus plays a dual role in any experience of Christian hospitality—he is both our host and our potential guest.

Over the years, the question of whether to offer assistance to a stranger has been intensified by the Christian understanding that it is Jesus himself who stands before us, in need of food and shelter.<sup>24</sup> The New Testament word *philoxenia* is quite clearly the opposite of a word we hear frequently today in our fear-filled and anxious world—*xenophobia*, fear of stranger. And this is nothing new, since people have been fearful of strangers since ancient times. In the early church “Christian hospitality was meant to be remedial,” says Christine Pohl, “counteracting the social stratification of the larger society by providing a modest and equal welcome to everyone.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Morris and Rothman, 245, 246.

<sup>22</sup> Pohl, 31.

<sup>23</sup> Ana María Pineda, “Hospitality,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. 1997), 33.

<sup>24</sup> Henry G. Brinton, *The Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Brinton, 10.

A distinctive characteristic of worship and hospitality in early Christian households was the inclusion of believers from different political, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In a fractured first century society, these followers of Christ were trying to create uncommon Christian communities that embraced all people with God's love and grace. They expressed respect and recognition for Christians of different backgrounds through the practice of hospitality and shared meals that helped people to see themselves as brothers and sisters at the table of God. Church members offered hospitality to meet the needs of traveling Christians and the local poor, as well as to enjoy fellowship when local believers would gather; as a result, early congregations developed a "trans local and trans ethnic identity."<sup>26</sup> Obviously, not every community lived up to this ideal. The apostle Paul complains about "divisions" and "factions" at the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:18, 19), and James warns against making "distinctions" between the rich and the poor in the community of faith, giving seats to the rich while forcing the poor to stand (Jas. 2: 1-7).<sup>27</sup>

It is reported that at the beginning of the Middle Ages, Benedict of Nursia developed a rule for monastic life that stressed hospitality to strangers, a practice grounded in Christ's identification with the stranger in Matthew 25:35.<sup>28</sup> Even today, the "heart of Benedictine spirituality is hospitality," writes church historian Diana Butler Bass in her book *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, reminding us "a Christian community is

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<sup>26</sup> Pohl, 42, 43.

<sup>27</sup> Brinton, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Pohl, 46-47.

not a closed community but extends welcome and shelter to all, regardless of class, status, or respectability.”<sup>29</sup>

John Calvin, himself a refugee from France, experienced what it is like to be an alien in a foreign land. Calvin wrote in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. To say that he does not deserve even your least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which . . . recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions.<sup>30</sup>

It is true that Calvin’s words were grounded in the traditions of the church, which historian Amy Oden has studied and found to be full of examples of hospitality. In her book, *And You Welcomed Me*, she includes excerpts from diaries, letters, sermons, and travelogues, all of which demonstrate that early Christians saw protecting pilgrims and hosting strangers as both a moral duty and a privilege.<sup>31</sup> This does not mean that the early Christians were referring to pilgrims and strangers as ex-offenders. Those pilgrims and strangers included Christians who were persecuted and released from prisons because of their faith.<sup>32</sup>

However, Christian hospitality became lost in the eighteenth century, and it disappeared as a significant moral practice in the 1700s. Strangers were still cared for, but responses to their needs were less frequently called hospitality. Churches provided for orphans and widows but rarely regarded hospitality as a category of ministry. Surprisingly, as early as the mid-sixteenth century, John Calvin mourned the demise of

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<sup>29</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith* (New York: Harper One, 2006), 84.

<sup>30</sup> Brinton, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Oden, 19-32

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 33.



ancient hospitality. He stated: “This office of humanity has . . . nearly ceased to be properly observed among men; for the ancient hospitality celebrated in histories, is unknown to us, and inns now supply the place of accommodations for strangers.” He warned that the increasing dependence on inns rather than on personal hospitality was an expression of human depravity.<sup>33</sup>

Because true hospitality has always been upsetting and disorienting, Christians in the early church denied welcome to two categories of people: those who persisted in immoral lifestyles (1 Cor. 5:9-11) and those who propagated false teaching (2 John 9-11). “I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber,” said Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. “Do not even eat with such a one.” (5:11). And John lifted up the importance of “the teaching of Christ” to the Christian community, while giving the command, “do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching.” (2 John 9-10) It certainly seemed prudent to draw a line between the Christian community and these two groups of people, but over time the church came to see that it was difficult to make accurate judgments about certain types of behavior—exactly who is “greedy” and who is a “reviler”?—and it was not always easy to define the boundaries of “the teaching of Christ.” Furthermore, the denial of hospitality through excommunication or anathema rarely led to repentance or reform. In fact, John Wesley stated that anathemas had a natural tendency to “utterly destroy” neighborly love, mercy, and justice.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948), 340.

<sup>34</sup> Pohl, 80-82.

*Radical Hospitality and the United Methodist Church*

The United Methodist Church has a long history of concern for social justice. Its members have often taken forthright positions on controversial issues involving Christian principles. Early Methodists expressed their opposition to the slave trade, to smuggling, and to the cruel treatment of prisoners.<sup>35</sup>

A social creed was adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) in 1908. Within the next decade similar statements were adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church (South), and by The Methodist Protestant Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church adopted a statement of social principles in 1946 at a time of the uniting of the United Brethren and the Evangelical Church. The United Methodist Church adopted a new statement of Social Principles, which was revised in 1976 (and by each successive General Conference).<sup>36</sup>

The social principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The social principles are a call to members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* – 2012 (Nashville: United Methodist Pub House, 2013) 208.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 255.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 301.

John Wesley and the eighteenth-century Methodists had a significant but ambiguous role in the history of Christian hospitality. Wesley's sense of mission is captured in a statement by a defense attorney in Dostoyevsky's novel. In the *Brothers Karamazov*, the court is challenged, "Let other nations think of retribution and the letter of the law; we will cling to the spirit and the meaning—the salvation and the reformation of the lost."<sup>38</sup> Wesley was indeed concerned for "the salvation and the reformation of the lost." He was also concerned with reform of the prevailing system. He had no systematic plan to confront the existing criminal justice system, but he sympathized with some lawbreakers, challenged prison conditions, and praised John Howard, the father of prison reforms.<sup>39</sup>

Wesley's restorative vision points to basics of a twenty-first century mission for and with prisoners. Three themes summarize this Wesleyan sense of mission. First, Wesleyan concerns for reform and holiness require a restorative vision that fits neither retributivism nor utilitarian deterrence. Retributivism deals with the policy or theory of the criminal justice system that advocates the punishment of criminals in retribution for the harm they inflicted on an individual. Whereas, utilitarian deterrence refers to the usefulness of punishment to prevent further crime by reforming the criminal or protecting society from the criminal. It does not fit rehabilitative theories of crime as sickness, for which prisoners are not responsible nor restitution theories focusing on monetary

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<sup>38</sup> Michael L. Hadley, *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, edited by Hadley (Albany, New York: State university of New York Press, 2001), 1. Hadley notes: "Dostoyevsky was thinking of the redemption of the offender in the then prevailing criminal justice system." He explains that Dostoyevsky did not have in mind today's restorative justice stress on healing the victim and the community as well as healing the offender.

<sup>39</sup> Manfred Marquardt summarizes Wesley's preaching and pastoral care, humanitarian aid, and publications related to prisoners and prison conditions in his chapter "Concern For Prisoners and Prison Reform," 77-86 of *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

compensation. Instead, a restorative vision seeks God's *shalom* for victims, for offenders, and for the human community.<sup>40</sup>

Second, a Wesleyan mission for and with prisoners seeks to help prisoners develop responsible citizenship. As with Christian mission in general, a Wesleyan mission seeks to make disciples, persons learning, growing, and living as responsible Christians. Part of Christian discipleship is the ministry, shared with others of non-Christian belief, to help prisoners to help themselves to develop responsible citizenship. Even as Wesley joined others to seek humane prison system, whether it helped prisoners to become Christians or not, we need to join others concerned about giving prisoners opportunity to develop responsible citizenship.<sup>41</sup>

Third, a Wesleyan mission, as with Christian mission in general is motivated by *redemptive grace*—grace that responds to God's love with a grateful effort to be lovingly gracious in seeking wholeness for the total person, even when persons do not receive the Gospel message. These three themes—restorative vision, responsible citizenship, and redemptive grace—describe a Wesleyan mission for the twenty-first century for victims, for prisoners, for families of both, and for the entire community.<sup>42</sup>

The United Methodists believe that hospitality is central to the Christian life because it is central to the gospel. At a time when community ties were weakening, Methodist small group meetings offered regular opportunities for intense personal interaction, relationship building, and oversight of new believers. Many of these meetings

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<sup>40</sup> Marquardt, 1-205.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 195.

<sup>42</sup> Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 545-546.

took place in the modest homes of Methodist believers, thus reintegrating church and household. These structures were essential to Wesley's ministry and provided the organizational context for spiritual growth, care for the sick and wayward, collections for those in need and the prisoners.<sup>43</sup>

Understanding the mission of the church to make disciples for Christ for the transformation of the world, Bishop Robert Schnase of The United Methodist Church wrote: *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. Bishop Schnase, in this book, tells the truth about a church that he loves, but explained that the love is one that calls us to recover a confidence and trust in the God who is the source of love and blessing. He writes that, "Vibrant, fruitful congregations practice Radical Hospitality." These are local churches that show the love of Christ by loving their neighbors, inviting, welcoming and including all sorts of new people, including ex-offenders into the life of the church and all its ministries and programs. When this happens there is no distinction between newcomer and those who have been attending the congregation all their lives. Bishop Schnase points to multiple passages of Scripture as evidence of this calling upon Christians—to welcome a stranger—setting the captives free—treating those they do not know just as they would treat God walking into their midst.<sup>44</sup> The impact of incarceration on ex-offenders, who are returning citizens, has caused some Christian communities to become healing communities—places where ex-offenders can find hope. It is a place for balancing justice

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<sup>43</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9: *The Methodist Societies* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), "General Rules of the Societies, 1743," 70; "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist," 256, 258.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 9, 10.

with mercy. This is possible because healing communities do not judge the offenders, but accept, love, care, and forgive them.

The early church has assisted prisoners by providing food, clothing, and religion to them. Also the early church would punish and correct the prisoner so that the same sins were not repeated. The work of forgiveness and reconciliation begins in prison and continues once the prisoner is released. The church has a mandate from the gospel to create ministries that provide assistance to those returning to the community after serving their prison time. The church has been on a mission to reconcile people to God, especially people who find themselves on the other side of the law.

The Christian community has been concerned about prisoners from the beginning of its history. The Christian community has been interested in reconciliation of the prisoners and not simply retribution. While issues of crime and punishment are paramount, changes in the prison system have historically been one of warehousing and punishment. Today, the emphasis is on reforming and restoring the ex-offenders to their respective communities to become productive law abiding citizens. This is where the faith-based organizations can play a major role in helping to integrate the ex-offenders, who want nothing more than to be accepted by the community upon their release from incarceration.

Prisons have ranged from houses of incarceration of various marginal population (pre-eighteenth century) to places to punish criminals and to protect society from them (nineteenth-century). In the twentieth-century the notion of rehabilitation took hold.

Some people think that the ills of society are impossible to cure, but humanitarian efforts, through radical hospitality, can have positive results, even with problems of crime

and imprisonment. Although crime is a deeply-rooted and complex problem, positive steps can be taken to improve the situation.

The United Methodists have a long history of involvement in social justice issues. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was concerned with reforms of the prison system. Wesley was sympathetic to some lawbreakers; he challenged prison conditions, and praised John Howard, the father of prison reforms.

The United Methodist Church is prominent in the prison reform movement by way of its social principles (1946) espousing, receiving, and reconciling ex-offenders. Three principles led Wesley's interest in prisoners' reforms: firstly, his vision on reform required a restorative vision; secondly, helping prisoners develop the quality of being a responsible citizen; and thirdly, were Wesley's thoughts on redemptive grace. United Methodists believe that Christian hospitality, especially radical hospitality is central to the Christian life.

### *Biblical Foundations*

Biblical research validates that the Bible is a resource that can be utilized in faith-based communities that focus on integrating ex-offenders into the local Christian church. In addition, there exist biblical illustrations that can be utilized by faith-based groups when addressing the needs of ex-offenders who require re-acclimating into the community upon their release from prison.<sup>45</sup> Material presented in this project proposes biblical explanation along with certain interpretation that the purpose, the goal, and the basis for working with ex-offenders are a directive by God.

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<sup>45</sup> Dr. William W. Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Impression ed. (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1993), 4, 10.

Highlighted selected Holy Scripture is the basis for faith communities acquiring a ministry of integrating African-American ex-offender males, who upon release from prison, require re-acclimating back into society. In addition to biblical narrative, the significant body of research that supports the growing social emphasis on assisting ex-offenders in acclimating to their post-prison life will be explored and representative pieces discussed. In addition, this body of social literature is further merged with a representative body of technical prison literature that provides in-depth exploration of the role that communities of faith will need to develop if the rate of recidivism among male African American ex-offenders is to be effectively impacted.

The first Scripture to examine is Genesis chapter 18:1-15:

The LORD appeared to Abraham<sup>\*</sup> by the oaks<sup>\*</sup> of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.<sup>2</sup> He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground.<sup>3</sup> He said, 'My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant.<sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and washes your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.<sup>5</sup> Let me bring a little bread, which you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.'<sup>6</sup> And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures<sup>\*</sup> of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.'<sup>7</sup> Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it.<sup>8</sup> Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.<sup>9</sup> They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.'<sup>10</sup> Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.<sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.<sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?'<sup>13</sup> The LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?"'<sup>14</sup> Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son?'<sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Except otherwise noted all scriptures are from the NRSV Bible.



The story of three men entering Abraham and Sarah's camp illustrates the fact about how to love strangers who you do not know. Abraham and Sarah, in Genesis 18, are camping by the oaks of Mamre, and Abraham is sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day when he looks up, sees three men standing near him, and immediately jumps up and runs from the tent to meet them. Bowing down, he offers them water for washing, bread to eat, and a place to rest. The men accepted Abraham's offer of hospitality, and he works with Sarah and his servant to prepare a full meal for them.

In the course of the meal, one of the men predicts that Sarah will have a son, which causes Sarah to laugh to herself, since both she and Abraham are advanced in age. But they quickly learn to take these words seriously, since it is none other than the Lord who is appearing to them in the form of these three strangers. The Lord says to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old? Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season and Sarah shall have a son'" (Gen. 18:13-14). Sure enough, Sarah conceives and bears a son named Isaac, just as God had promised, and years later the writer of the letter to the Hebrews uses this story as the basis for the recommendation, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." (Heb. 13:2)

This passage reminds us about the Wesleyan focus *on practical divinity*: investment in fellow believers throughout the global church, particularly those who are abused or marginalized in a hostile world. Wesley encouraged visitation of all prisoners as a part of doing all possible good, offering to them the same grace and growth in discipleship that we find in our fellowship with other Christians. "The stranger at our

door can be both gift and challenge,” concludes Catholic sister Ana Maria Pineda, “human and divine.”<sup>47</sup>

Hospitality is a quality of God and is meant to be a quality of God’s people as well. The call for hospitality toward strangers appears multiple times in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it is usually linked to the experience of the Israelites themselves, as slaves and strangers in the land of Egypt.

The Old Testament texts, writes Christine Pohl, “reminded the Israelites that they knew the heart of the stranger from their own experience (Exod. 23:9) and therefore had to treat strangers well. The Lord watches over the strangers,” says Psalm 146:9; “he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.” And just exactly who are “the wicked” that God brings to ruin? “They kill the widow and the stranger,” says Psalm 94, “they murder the orphan, and they say, ‘The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive.’” (vv.6-7) Again and again throughout the Bible, God’s people are taught to treat the aliens among them with justice: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt,” (Exod. 22:21) and “when an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien . . . you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” (Lev. 19:33-34) Before the people of Israel cross into the Promised Land, Moses says, “cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.’ And all the people say, ‘Amen!’” (Deut. 27:19)<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Pineda, 34, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Brinton, 5.

A beautiful illustration of hospitality is found in the book of Ruth, where a rich man of Bethlehem named Boaz meets a foreigner—a Moabite woman named Ruth. She came to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and has gone into the fields to glean among the ears of grain, behind the Israelite reapers. Boaz sees her, saying, “I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.” Ruth bows down before him and asks, “Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?” Boaz answers, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me . . . May the Lord reward you of your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” (Ruth 2:1-13) Boaz and Ruth became husband and wife and then have a son, who becomes the grandfather of King David.<sup>49</sup>

This is a marvelous illustration of biblical teaching on hospitality, although, notes Letty Russell, it is “in direct contradiction of the earlier Israelite view that foreigners should be excluded from Israel.”<sup>50</sup>

The New Testament scripture on radical hospitality will come from what is commonly called the last judgment narrative Matthew 25:34 -46:

<sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to

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<sup>49</sup> Brinton, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, ed. J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 42.

drink?<sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?<sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”<sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”<sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;<sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,<sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”<sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?”<sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”<sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.<sup>51</sup>

Christine Pohl, the author of *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, says that the most important biblical passage for the entire tradition on Christian hospitality is found in the final judgment of Matthew 25, in which Jesus says, “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’ (vv.34-35). The message of this passage is that we welcome Jesus the king when we welcome a stranger, and that our place in God’s eternal kingdom is connected to the place we make in our own lives for those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, in prison, or a stranger to us. God’s invitation into the Kingdom, Pohl argues, is tied to Christian hospitality in this life. “Acts of welcoming the stranger, or leaving someone outside cold and hungry, take an intensely heightened significance when it is Jesus himself who experiences the consequences of our ministry or the lack of it.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Except otherwise noted, biblical passage is from the NRSV of the Bible.

<sup>52</sup> Pohl, 4.

Author Henry Brinton suggested that hospitality is not simply an action tied to final judgment in the Bible. Throughout the whole of the scriptures, writes Brinton, hospitality is a practice that is valued and demonstrated by people of faith in various times and places. In a New Year message following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said that he used to think that the greatest command in the Bible was “you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” but then he realized that this command appears in only one place in the Hebrew Bible. More significantly, he said, “in more than thirty places it commands us to love the stranger.”<sup>53</sup> This is difficult, because for the most part it is not too hard for us to love our neighbors, people who are similar to us. “What is tough is to love the stranger,” said Sacks, “the person who is not like us, who has a different skin color, faith, or background, is the real challenge. It was in ancient times. It still is today.”<sup>54</sup> Brinton and Sacks’ comments support the argument that individuals returning to the faith communities, after being released from incarceration, be accepted, regardless of the color of their skin, religious affiliation, background or criminal records. These authors, it can be observed, hold that the Bible commands us to love the stranger in our midst, not so much our neighbors.

We feed the hungry and welcome strangers because that is what Jesus did as a gracious and loving host during his earthly ministry and because that is what Jesus continues to do through the Christian community today. But we also practice hospitality because it gives us an opportunity to welcome Jesus in the form of people who are hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, and in prison. The line from Matthew 25, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me,” echoes again and again throughout the ancient Christian texts.

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<sup>53</sup> Brinton, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Pohl, 97.

In the early church, the concern for strangers continues as illustrated in the story of the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. In this story, the risen Jesus comes near and walks with them, but their eyes are kept from recognizing him. When Jesus asks about the events they are discussing, one of them says, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” (v.18). In this story, Jesus is depicted as a stranger, and his disciples are challenged to show hospitality toward him. Sure enough, as they come near the village that is their destination, Jesus walks ahead as if he is going on. But the two disciples urge him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” (v.29) So Jesus goes in to stay with them, and when he is at table with them, he takes bread, blesses it and breaks it, and gives it to them. Then their eyes are opened and they recognize him—and he vanishes from their sight. Like Abraham and Sarah, they discover that when they welcome a stranger, they welcome the Lord.<sup>55</sup>

The apostle Paul says that one of the marks of the true Christian is to “contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.” (Rom. 12:13) Paul benefits from this practice himself, when he, Timothy, and Silas first arrive in Philippi on their missionary journey to Macedonia and meet a woman named Lydia at a place of prayer by a river. (Acts 16:11-15) Lydia hears the gospel message and is baptized along with her household, and then she urges Paul, Timothy, and Silas to “come and stay at my home.” (v.15). This they do. In similar fashion, Peter encourages members of the early church to “be hospitable to one another without complaining,” (1 Pet. 4:9) and Paul identifies a faithful widow as “one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints’

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<sup>55</sup> Brinton, 7.

feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.” (1Tim.5:10) Paul also includes hospitality in his list of qualifications for bishops: “above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable;” (1 Tim.3:2) “hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled.” (Titus 1:8) Paul encourages all his followers to “welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Rom. 15:7) Clearly, Christian hospitality is grounded in the practices of Christ, and some the best examples of this virtue are found in the ministry of Jesus himself.<sup>56</sup>

### *United Methodist Perspective*

As a United Methodist Elder, endorsed by the Board of Ordained Ministry, and serving as a prison chaplain for seventeen years, the importance of faith communities providing a safe place to practice radical hospitality, especially to African-American male offenders, release from incarceration is understandable.

Three authors address the critical position faith communities have in supporting returning citizens upon their release from prison. Larry Hollon, top staff executive of the Nashville-based United Methodist agency, provides his view on the church. From a United Methodist perspective, he posits that the United Methodist churches throughout the world are rethinking church — not only creating a better public image, but changing the culture of the church. Previous campaigns talked about the church in terms of *Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Brinton, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Church Rethink Church (<http://www.examiner.com/topic/rethink-church/articles>). Accessed 3/3/2013.

However, in introducing this new phase, Reverend L. Hollon, states that the word *restore* must be considered “as a verb, not an adjective, a word of action where the people of the United Methodist Church open their hearts, minds and doors to transform the world.”<sup>58</sup>

Hollon’s is only one opinion among many within the United Methodist Church concerning how the United Methodist community of believers is to exercise greater inclusivity towards others.

Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe propose a more personal approach where individuals integrate their own personal experiences into biblical stories. These two authors argue that in using this approach, individuals can read the Bible and use their own life experiences and background as means of expertise and authority to draw biblical interpretations from as well as the authors in the Bible. They state:

One’s initial acquaintance with and impression of the author’s communities is through the text being studied. That knowledge, however, is not limited by the reader’s own experiences, but rather it can be supplemented or even corrected by the interpretations of others. Important insights will come from other persons in one’s own community, both those who may have information because of their previous study and those whose own life experience gives them insight into crucial questions and possible references in the text.<sup>59</sup>

People need to integrate their own experiences into biblical stories. This will allow for them to become experts to draw relevant biblical interpretations of the text.

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<sup>58</sup> Church Rethink Church.

<sup>59</sup> Tiffany, Frederick C. and Ringe, Sharon H., *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 97.



### *Radical Christian Hospitality*

Congregations that make a positive first impression in everything from architecture to worship help invite the stranger into their midst, and congregations that further welcome and include those visitors through meals and small groups deepen the connections people have to God and to each other. Hospitable places and practices are necessary anchors for congregations that want to welcome and include new people in the life of the church. In these Christian communities there is no distinction between the newcomer and those who have been attending the congregation all their lives.<sup>60</sup>

The Christian community, especially the churches, should be welcoming, inviting, and loving even to the strangers in their midst. Under the directions of the local church's leadership radical hospitality should be the focus of the congregation. Radical hospitality includes listening to the needs and concerns of those who are strangers within their gates. Dr. Justes argues that she began to see the power of a connection between listening and hospitality. This connection, according to Justes, was enhanced by discovering the great value ascribed to hospitality found in scriptural texts. Hospitality and listening fit well together, asserts Justes. She believes that listening can be enhanced by some gifts found in understanding hospitality. As does hospitality, listening, states Justes, does not only involve receiving another person, but also includes being welcoming and open to the speaker who is in our presence. Ability to listen, asserts Justes is rooted in the person or character of the listener. The same can be said for hospitality.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.examiner.com/article/churches-101-what-is-radical-hospitality>

<sup>61</sup> Justes, Emma J. *Hearing beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xiii.

This is the focus of the United Methodist Church today—vibrant, fruitful congregation practicing radical hospitality. Radical hospitality occurs when local churches show the love of Christ by loving their neighbors, inviting, welcoming and including all sorts of new people, including returning citizens released from prison, in the life of the church and all its ministries and programs.<sup>62</sup>

While other Christian religions, such as the Baptist and American Baptist, are involved with the practices of hospitality to ex-offenders, my desire is to utilize the practices of radical hospitality from a United Methodist perspective, because of my own religious tradition. As an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, and based on research, the United Methodist experience do as an exemplary job of addressing this issue of radical hospitality. It is my intention to use this within the United Methodist tradition therefore the manual and the research reflect this intent.

### *Saddleback Church*

The United Methodist radical hospitality emphasis which includes ex-offenders, can be found in the example of Saddleback Church which helps citizens returning from prison (ex-offenders), find deep peace and lasting freedom through Celebrate Recovery, a ministry born out of the heart of Saddleback Church. Used in thousands of churches nationwide, this program is part of Pastor Warren's Purpose Driven Team which began within Warren's congregation but now has spread into other communities, having as their mission; helping citizens returning from prison (ex-offenders) overcome their hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Celebrate Recovery is based on biblical sayings of Jesus Christ

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<sup>62</sup><http://www.examiner.com/article/churches-101-what-is-radical-hospitality>

rather than traditional psychological theory. This program is most effective in helping people transform their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>63</sup>

In his book, *Celebrate Recovery Inside*, author John Baker describes how Dr. Rick Warren, began the Celebrate Recovery Program at Saddleback Church. Today there are over 17,000 people involved in the Saddleback program. The program is attracting over seventy percent of its members from outside the church. There are over 19,000 churches involved worldwide. Baker states that eighty-five percent of the people that participate in the program, stay with the church and nearly half of them serve as volunteers. He summarizes the vision of this program as follows:

To create a safe place for not only alcoholics, but a place for codependents; people with eating disorders; those struggling with sexual addictions, anger, those dealing with past or current physical or sexual abuse issues; those in need of financial recovery and many more groups. In short, anyone who is dealing with any kind of hurt, hang-up or habit.<sup>64</sup>

John Baker, in his work concerning this Christ-centered recovery program goes on to propose twelve steps based on Holy Scripture that help ex-offenders in their efforts of acclimating into communities outside of prison life:

Admit powerlessness over addictions and compulsive behaviors (Romans 7:18)

Come to believe that a power greater than self could restore oneself to sanity (Philippians 2:13)

Make a decision to turn one's life and will over to the care of God (Romans 12:1)

Take a moral inventory of oneself (Lamentations 3:40)

Admit to God, to oneself, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs (James 5:16)

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<sup>63</sup> <http://www.examiner.com/article/churches-101-what-is-radical-hospitality>

<sup>64</sup> John Baker, *Celebrate Recovery: A Recovery Inside: a Christ-centered Program Based On Eight Principles from the Beatitudes*. (Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 9.

Be ready to have God remove all defects of character (James 4:10)

Humbly ask God to remove all shortcomings (1 John 1:9)

Made a list of all persons that have been harmed and be willing to make amends to them all (Luke 6:31)

Make direct amends whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others (Matthew 5:23-24)

Continue to take inventory and when wrong, promptly admit it (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Through prayer and meditation to improve one's conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will and power to carry that out. (Colossians 3:16)

Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, try to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all affairs (Galatians 6:1).<sup>65</sup>

### *Ex-offenders and the Church's Role in Ex-offenders' Re-acclimating to Society*

In his book, *Equipping Your Church to Minister to Ex-Offenders*, author Louis N. Jones defines “ex-offenders” as persons who have broken a Federal, state, county or city ordinance; have been convicted and sent to jail or prison, have been released, and have determined that they will not break the law again. However, they are also men and women with spouses, children, aspirations, dreams, struggles and joys, and they need to be treated with dignity and respect.<sup>66</sup> Many people would define an ex-offender as anyone who has been released from imprisonment. These people, however, are better defined as *ex-prisoners*. In fact, an ex-offender is someone who has put criminal offenses

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<sup>65</sup> <http://www.examiner.com/article/churches-101-what-is-radical-hospitality>, 12.

<sup>66</sup> Louis N. Jones, *Equipping Your Church to Minister to Ex-Offenders*. (Washington, D.C.: Conquest Publishers, 1998), 2.

behind him or her and is prepared to begin a new life.<sup>67</sup> The need for the Christian church to provide ministries that would help ex-offenders re-acclimate into the community is critical.

The mission of the church, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, is the prime reason that Bishop Robert Schnase of the Missouri conference of the United Methodist Church wrote the book: *Five practices of fruitful congregations*. In this book, Bishop Schnase tells the truth about a church that he loves, but indicated that the love is one that calls us to recover a confidence and trust in the God who is the source of life and blessing. This God calls us through Jesus Christ to be disciples, to bear fruit (John 15), and this fruitfulness can be measured by our engagement in the five practices: radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission and service, and extravagant generosity.<sup>68</sup>

This cycle repeats itself constantly. Moreover, when the person is released from incarceration are they invited into the churches? Do churches have mentors for them? Do churches assist in providing jobs for them?<sup>69</sup>

The formerly incarcerated person has many issues to resolve upon release; unfortunately, many churches are ill equipped to deal with these ageless societal problems. A significant number of ex-offenders attest that many ministries come inside the prisons to minister, however few are waiting to help them when they get out.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Jones, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Schnase, 9, 130.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 3.

*The Radical Hospitality of Jesus Christ*

In the Gospel of John, Jesus performs his first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, turning more than one hundred gallons of water into wine, so that the wedding celebration can continue. (John 2:1-11) Interpretations of this passage may vary, but at its basic level it is a miracle of hospitality. Jesus goes on to feed a crowd of 5,000 (Matt. 14:13-21), Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-14) and then feed another 4,000 (Matt. 15:32-39, Mark 8:1-10), revealing his desire to nourish people both physically and spiritually. He washes the feet of his disciples, (John 13:1-20) institutes the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20), and after his resurrection cooks a fish breakfast for his disciples. (John 21:1-24) Jesus teaches us what it means to care for each other in the parable of the Good Samaritan, (Luke 10:30-37) welcomes little children in spite of his disciples' objections (Matt. 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17), and instructs his followers in the nature of hospitality with the words, "when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." (Luke 14:13)<sup>71</sup>

In the gospels, Jesus enters into the lives of people who are on the margins of society, struggling with hunger, shame, disease, and homelessness. He does this out of deep compassion for them, but also because He shares their experience—we should never forget that Jesus himself appears to people in the towns and villages of Palestine as a homeless stranger, with no place to lay his head. (Matt. 8:20)<sup>72</sup>

Jesus' own experience of homelessness, hunger, thirst, and nakedness shapes his empathy for the distressed of this world and motivates him to heal and to save those who

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<sup>71</sup> Brinton, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 2.

are in the greatest need. When Jesus says that anyone who feeds the hungry and welcomes strangers is really feeding and welcoming him, he is not kidding—he knows this deprivation firsthand. (Matt. 25:34-35) If we are going to model our ministries on the ministry of Jesus we need to enter into the lives of the distressed strangers in our midst and practice hospitality in the same way that Jesus did.

Letty Russell insists that “the ministry of the church is to be partners with strangers, to welcome those whom Christ welcomed, and thus learn to be a community in which people are made one in Jesus Christ in spite of their different classes, religious backgrounds, genders, races, and ethnic groups.”<sup>73</sup>

Jesus never allows criticism to disrupt his table fellowship with those who need to hear his message. When the Pharisees ask why Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners, he responds, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” (Matt. 9:11-12) He allows a sinful woman to kiss his feet and anoint them while he is having dinner with a Pharisee, and because of her great faith he forgives her. (Luke: 36-50) He calls out to a notorious tax collector named Zacchaeus and invites himself to dinner, saying, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” (Luke 19:1-10) And Jesus even allows himself to be changed by one of these encounters: When he meets a Canaanite woman from the district of Tyre and Sidon, he initially denies her request for help, saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel . . . it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She says, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Deeply impressed by her faith, Jesus grants her request and performs a healing of her daughter, a person outside the Israelite community of faith. (Matt. 15:21-28, Mark: 24-30)

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<sup>73</sup> Russell, 20.

Some associate the Bible with having only tangential relationship with societal handling of and response to those who find themselves members of the growing population of incarcerated human beings. “Love thy neighbor”, “turn the other cheek”, “I am my brother’s keeper” are presumed to be appropriate biblical sayings for those who reside on the right side of the law; however, for those who land on the wrong side of the civil code, thus violating their right to live freely within society, these scriptural sayings are relegated to a status of Christian euphuisms that sound lovely but that are not practical when dealing with twenty-first century miscreants and their associated immoral behavior.

Scriptures do not speak specifically to the modern day African-American male ex-offenders, but rather to all poor and marginalized people—of which the African-American male ex-offender is the largest sub-group and has experienced the harshest social conditions that have resulted in his unfortunate incarceration in greater numbers in the U.S.

Biblical scripture interpretation, especially the teaching and writings from the Old and the New Testaments, can be utilized to help formulate ministries that are grounded in the bedrock of a divine plan.

The scriptures are clear on the spiritual importance of outreach to the “stranger.” In this project, the ex-offender is considered a stranger. Jesus directly included ministering to prisoner among the criteria considered on judgment day. (Matt. 25:36). Authentic spirituality calls for radical hospitality in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. In the Epistle to the Romans “brotherly love” and “entertaining strangers” (literally *filoxenia*, “love of the stranger”, i.e. hospitality) are equally enjoined while



concern with prisoners follows immediately with “remember the prisoner as if chained with them—those who are mistreated.” (Hebrews 13:3)

The key to helping the returning citizens is the realization within the faith communities of the necessity of radical hospitality toward the ex-offenders who turn to them. As mentioned in the case of the United Methodist Church, this ministry would include an inclusive and welcoming attitude as well as practical efforts in assisting the ex-offenders in finding a job, affordable housing, and providing pastoral care and counseling.

When the faith communities begin to reach out to the returning citizens, they will be enriched by practicing what the Lord taught his disciples. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks mentioned the command to “love the stranger” as recorded in the Hebrew Bible over thirty times. It was a way to remind God’s people of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. As all humanity is considered strangers in a foreign land, we to welcome the stranger, in this case, African-American males returning from incarceration. When this happens, a person will be welcoming Jesus Christ.

As noted, while there are certain ministries operated by church members within the prison, there are very few communities of faith ready to help ex-offenders when they are released from prison, especially the African-American male ex-offender.

This ministry is greatly needed and would be a source of blessing for all who participate: the ex-offender, those who minister to the ex-offender, and the community in which the ex-offender would eventually be accepted.

### *Theological Foundation*

Theology is described as the language about God. Christian theology is language about God's liberating activity in the world on behalf of the freedom of the oppressed. Any talk about God that fails to make God's liberation of the oppressed its starting point is not Christian. It may be philosophical and have some relation to scripture, but it is not Christian. For the word "Christian" connects theology inseparably to God's will to set the captive free.<sup>74</sup>

Theology is a word that has many explanations. Dorothy Solle in *Thinking about God*, describes theology as "faith seeking the clarity of its cause."<sup>75</sup> "Solle continues to detail theology as a reflection on Christian life amid struggles for freedom or liberation, for the full humanity of all persons, and for the transformation of human persons and societies as manifestations of its expectation of the reign of God."<sup>76</sup> Another explanation is presented by author Don Thorsen in his book *An Exploration of Christian Theology*. He writes, "Theology is the systematic study of God and God's relationship to the world. The word theology can be understood in its Greek origins. Theo's means "God" and logos mean "word, discourse, study, science."<sup>77</sup>

This project embraces a theology that calls for radical hospitality by Christian communities to address the needs of ex-offenders who require re-acclimating into society upon their release from prison.

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<sup>74</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, English Ed. (Minneapolis: Harper San Francisco, 1978), 8.

<sup>75</sup> Dorothy Solle, *Thinking about God*, (London: Philadelphia Trinity Press International, 1990), 1 – 13.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 1-13.

<sup>77</sup> Thorsen Don, *Exploration of Christian Theology*. (Peabody: Baker Academic, 2008), 4-10.

There will be an examination of the biblical prospective of this project from the Old and New Testament literature. In addition, the teachings and practices of my denomination, the United Methodist Church, relating to radical hospitality will be argued.

The major themes from scholars like Cone, Tillich, Barth, and Wesley supports the theological foundation of this project. Redemptive grace and black liberation theology is discussed. My own experience and reality in light of what this context is experiencing today is being offered.

### *The Biblical Perspective*

Kenneth Pohly, argues that the Old and New Testament writings “identify a growing set of functions for the oversight of the first Christian congregations as the new covenant community. The earliest reference to a division of responsibility in the church is in Acts where it is recorded that the twelve apostles, upon urging of the Hellenists, selected and appointed seven disciples to administer the distribution of food among the needy while they (the Twelve) devoted themselves to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:1-6) There is a hint in this of a hierarchy of tasks suggested by the apostles: “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables.”<sup>78</sup>

According to Cone, a theologian brings to the scripture the perspective of a community. Ideally, the concern of that community is consistent with the concern of the community that gave us the scriptures. It is the task of theology to keep these two

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<sup>78</sup> Kenneth Pohly, *Transforming the Rough Places: the Ministry of Supervision* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2001), 13.

communities (biblical and contemporary) in constant tension in order that we may be able to speak meaningfully about God.<sup>79</sup>

It is said that the “Bible is the story of creation, the rebellion of humanity, the election and covenant with Israel, the coming of the Messiah, the reconciliation of God and humanity, the birth of the church as God’s instrument in the divine mission to the world, and the gift of the Spirit as the promise of final fulfillment. The Christian gospel and the Christian faith are based in these stories, and Christian theology attempts to understand and interpret these stories of what God has done and is doing.”<sup>80</sup> Therefore, it is significant that the theological foundations for this project be examined from a biblical prospective.

Christine Pohl, the author of *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, says that the most important biblical passage for the entire tradition on Christian hospitality is found in the final judgment of Matthew 25, in which Jesus says, “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’” (Vv. 34-35) The message of this passage is that we welcome Jesus the king when we welcome a stranger, and that our place in God’s eternal kingdom is connected to the place we make in our own lives for those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, in prison, or a stranger to us. God’s invitation into the Kingdom, Pohl argues, is tied to Christian hospitality in this life. “Acts of welcoming the stranger, or leaving

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<sup>79</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 36.

<sup>80</sup> Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra. *Introduction to Theology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 1.

someone outside cold and hungry, take an intensely heightened significance when it is Jesus himself who experiences the consequences of our ministry or the lack of it.”<sup>81</sup>

Author Henry Brinton suggested that hospitality is not simply an action tied to final judgment in the Bible. Throughout the whole of the scriptures, writes Brinton, hospitality is a practice that is valued and demonstrated by people of faith in various times and places. In a New Year message following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said that he used to think that the greatest command in the Bible was “you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” but then he realized that this command appears in only one place in the Hebrew Bible. More significantly, he said, “in more than thirty places it commands us to love the stranger.”<sup>82</sup> This is difficult, because for the most part it is not too hard for us to love our neighbors, people who are similar to us. “What is tough is to love the stranger,” said Sacks, “the person who is not like us, who has a different skin color, faith, or background, is the real challenge. It was in ancient times. It still is today.”<sup>83</sup> Brinton and Sacks’ comments support the argument that individuals returning to the faith communities, after being released from incarceration, be accepted, regardless of the color of their skin, religious affiliation, background or criminal records. These authors, it can be observed, hold that the Bible commands us to love the stranger in our midst, not so much our neighbors.

Again and again throughout the Bible, God’s people are taught to treat the aliens among them with justice, “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien for you were

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<sup>81</sup> Pohl, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Brinton, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Pohl, 97.

aliens in the land of Egypt,” (Exod. 22:21) and “when an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien . . . you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” (Lev. 19:33-34) Before the people of Israel cross into the Promised Land, Moses says, “cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.’ And all the people say, ‘Amen!’” (Deut. 27:19).<sup>84</sup>

We feed the hungry and welcome strangers because that is what Jesus did as a gracious and loving host during his earthly ministry and because that is what Jesus continues to do through the Christian community today. But we also practice hospitality because it gives us an opportunity to welcome Jesus in the form of people who are hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, and in prison. The line from Matthew 25, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me,” echoes again and again throughout the ancient Christian texts.

In the early church, the concern for strangers continues as illustrated in the story of the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. In this story, the risen Jesus comes near and walks with them, but their eyes are kept from recognizing him. When Jesus asks about the events they are discussing, one of them says, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” (v. 18) in this story, Jesus is depicted as a stranger, and his disciples are challenged to show hospitality toward him. Sure enough, as they come near the village that is their destination, Jesus walks ahead as if he is going on. But the two disciples urge him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” (v. 29) So Jesus goes in to stay with them, and when he is at table with them, he takes bread, blesses it and breaks it, and gives it to them. Then their eyes are opened

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<sup>84</sup> Brinton, 5.

and they recognize him—and he vanishes from their sight. Like Abraham and Sarah, they discover that when they welcome a stranger, they welcome the Lord.<sup>85</sup>

In the gospels, Jesus enters into the lives of people who are on the margins of society, struggling with hunger, shame, disease, and homelessness. He does this out of deep compassion for them, but also because He shares their experience—we should never forget that Jesus himself appears to people in the towns and villages of Palestine as a homeless stranger, with no place to lay his head. (Matt. 8:20)<sup>86</sup>

Jesus' own experience of homelessness, hunger, thirst, and nakedness shapes his empathy for the distressed of this world and motivates him to heal and to save those who are in the greatest need. When Jesus says that anyone who feeds the hungry and welcomes strangers is really feeding and welcoming him, he is not kidding—he knows this deprivation firsthand. (Matt. 25:34-35) If we are going to model our ministries on the ministry of Jesus we need to enter into the lives of the distressed strangers in our midst and practice hospitality in the same way that Jesus did.

Letty Russell insists that “the ministry of the church is to be partners with strangers, to welcome those whom Christ welcomed, and thus learn to be a community in which people are made one in Jesus Christ in spite of their different classes, religious backgrounds, genders, races, and ethnic groups.”<sup>87</sup>

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Heb. 13:2)

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<sup>85</sup> Brinton, 7.

<sup>86</sup> Sutherland, 2.

<sup>87</sup> Russell, 20.

This passage reminds us about the Wesleyan focus on practical divinity: investment in fellow believers throughout the global church, particularly those who are abused or marginalized in a hostile world. Wesley encouraged visitation of all prisoners as a part of doing all possible good, offering to them the same grace and growth in discipleship that we find in our fellowship with other Christians. “The stranger at our door can be both gift and challenge,” concludes Catholic sister Ana Maria Pineda, “human and divine.”<sup>88</sup>

Hospitality is a quality of God and is meant to be a quality of God’s people as well. The call for hospitality toward strangers appears multiple times in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it is usually linked to the experience of the Israelites themselves, as slaves and strangers in the land of Egypt.

### *Radical Hospitality and the United Methodist Church*

The author, Richard Bundy, in his dissertation entitled, “What Happens When Nobody Comes?” alluded to the fact that “the church is responsible for bridging the gaps of humanity by reconciling even the lost and imprisoned to the body of Christ. Jesus not only saved, taught and healed, but he spent time with the diseased, poor, and the people cast away by society like the prisoners and ex-offenders.”<sup>89</sup> This has been the mission of the United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Church has a lengthy history of concern for social justice. Members of this church have often taken forthright positions on controversial issues

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<sup>88</sup> Pineda, 34, 42.

<sup>89</sup> Richard M. Bundy, Jr., *What Happens When Nobody Comes?* (Dayton: D.Min Project, United Theological Seminary, 1996), 5.



involving Christian principles. Early Methodists expressed their opposition to the slave trade, to smuggling and to the cruel treatment of prisoners.<sup>90</sup>

A social creed was adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) in 1908. Within the next decade similar statements were adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church (South), and by the Methodist Protestant Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church adopted a new statement of Social Principles, which was revised in 1976 (and by each successive General Conference).<sup>91</sup>

The social principles are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The social principles are a call to members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.<sup>92</sup>

John Wesley and the eighteenth-century Methodists had a significant but ambiguous role in the history of Christian hospitality. Wesley's sense of mission is captured in a statement by a defense attorney in Dostoyevsky's novel. In the *Brothers Karamazov*, the court is challenged, "Let other nations think of retribution and the letter of the law; we will cling to the spirit and the meaning—the salvation and the reformation of the lost."<sup>93</sup> Wesley was indeed concerned for "the salvation and the reformation of the lost." He was also concerned with reform of the prevailing system. He had no systematic

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<sup>90</sup> *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2008* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Pub. House, 2008), 11-857.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 368.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>93</sup> Hadley, 1. Hadley notes: "Dostoyevsky was thinking of the redemption of the offender in the then prevailing criminal justice system." He explains that Dostoyevsky did not have in mind today's restorative justice stress on healing the victim and the community as well as healing the offender.

plan to confront the existing criminal justice system, but he sympathized with some lawbreakers, challenged prison conditions, and praised John Howard, the father of prison reforms.<sup>94</sup>

Wesley's restorative vision points to basics of a twenty-first century mission for and with prisoners. Three themes summarize this Wesleyan sense of mission. First, Wesleyan concerns for reform and holiness require a restorative vision that fits neither retributivism nor utilitarian deterrence. Retributivism deals with the policy or theory of the criminal justice system that advocates the punishment of criminals in retribution for the harm they inflicted on an individual. Whereas, utilitarian deterrence refers to the usefulness of punishment to prevent further crime by reforming the criminal or protecting society from the criminal. It does not fit rehabilitative theories of crime as sickness, for which prisoners are not responsible nor restitution theories focusing on monetary compensation. Instead, a restorative vision seeks God's shalom for victims, for offenders, and for the human community.<sup>95</sup>

Second, a Wesleyan mission for and with prisoners seeks to help prisoners develop responsible citizenship. As with Christian mission in general, a Wesleyan mission seeks to make disciples, persons learning, growing, and living as responsible Christians. Part of Christian discipleship is the ministry, shared with others of non-Christian belief, to help prisoners to help themselves to develop responsible citizenship. Even as Wesley joined others to seek a humane prison system, whether it helped

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<sup>94</sup>Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 1-85.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 83.

prisoners to become Christians or not, we need to join others concerned about giving prisoners opportunity to develop responsible citizenship.<sup>96</sup>

Third, a Wesleyan mission, as with Christian mission in general is motivated by redemptive grace—grace that responds to God’s love with a grateful effort to be lovingly gracious in seeking wholeness for the total person, even when persons do not receive the gospel message. These three themes—restorative vision, responsible citizenship, and redemptive grace—describe a Wesleyan mission for the twenty-first century for victims, for prisoners, for families of both, and for the entire community.<sup>97</sup>

The United Methodists believe that hospitality is central to the Christian life because it is central to the gospel. At a time when community ties were weakening, Methodist small group meetings offered regular opportunities for intense personal interaction, relationship building, and oversight of new believers. Many of these meetings took place in the modest homes of Methodist believers, thus reintegrating church and household. These structures were essential to Wesley’s ministry and provided the organizational context for spiritual growth, care for the sick and wayward, collections for those in need and the prisoners.<sup>98</sup>

Understanding the mission of the church to make disciples for Christ for the transformation of the world, Bishop Robert Schnase of The United Methodist Church wrote *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. Bishop Schnase, in this book, tells the truth about a church that he loves, but explained that the love is one that calls us to

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<sup>96</sup> Marquardt, 544.

<sup>97</sup> John Wesley, *Works of John Wesley* (np: The Perfect Library, 2013), 545-546.

<sup>98</sup> Rupert Davies, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989) *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9: “General Rules of the Societies, 1743,” 70; “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist,” 256, 258.

recover a confidence and trust in the God who is the source of love and blessing. He writes that, “Vibrant, fruitful congregations practice Radical Hospitality.” These are local churches that show the love of Christ by loving their neighbors, inviting, welcoming and including all sorts of new people, including ex-offenders into the life of the church and all its ministries and programs. When this happens there is no distinction between newcomer and those who have been attending the congregation all their lives. Bishop Schnase points to multiple passages of scripture as evidence of this calling upon Christians—to welcome a stranger—setting the captives free—treating those they do not know just as they would treat God walking into their midst.<sup>99</sup> For me, redemptive grace and liberation theology are significant to the foundation of this project.

#### *Major Doctrinal Themes of the Theological Foundations*

In agreement with Karl Barth and Paul Tillich that the Bible and culture are important data for theology. But an examination of their work shows that culture plays a much larger role in Tillich’s theology, whereas the Bible is crucial for Barth. For Barth, scripture is the witness to the word of God and thus is indispensable to doing theology. Tillich, on the other hand, agrees that the Bible is important, but holds that the task of making the gospel relevant to the contemporary mind is equally important. That being the case, the only legitimate starting point of theology is the man Jesus Christ who is the revelation of God.<sup>100</sup> It is this redemptive grace of God, through Jesus, that is so relevant in this project.

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<sup>99</sup> Schnase, 9, 10.

<sup>100</sup> Cone, 21, 22

Redemptive grace is one of the distinctive features of the religion of the Bible. No other system of religious thought, past or present, contains an emphasis on divine grace comparable to that of the Bible. The supreme lesson of the gospel is that God so loved the world in its brokenness that He gave His only begotten and beloved Son for the restoration of the community He created. The chief goal of Christ in His ministry was to have people experience the redemptive grace of the Kingdom of God. This grace is the result of the love of God. Through the gospel proclaimed by Christ, people could be redeemed, restored, or reborn into right relationship with God. The evidence of this conversion is love for our neighbor.<sup>101</sup>

As a general definition, the doctrine of grace pertains to God's activity rather than to his nature. Although God is gracious, this trait of his nature is revealed only in relation to his created works and to his redemptive enterprise. In other words, grace is to be understood in terms of a dynamic expression of the divine personality rather than as a static attribute of God's nature. Grace is the dimension of divine activity that enables God to confront human indifference and rebellion with an inexhaustible capacity to forgive and to bless. God is gracious in action.<sup>102</sup>

In a solemn confirmation of the promise to Abraham, God affirmed, "My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations . . . And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant." (17:4, 7) This promise was to be

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<sup>101</sup> Lisa Barnes Lampman and Michelle D. Shattuck ed., *God and the Victim: Theological Reflections on Evil, Victimization, Justice, and Forgiveness* (Washington, D.C: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 246.

<sup>102</sup> Walter A. Elwell ed. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub Group, 1988), 898.

understood as finding fulfillment on the basis of grace, not of race, so that it would become applicable to all Abraham's offspring—not only to Jewish believers, his racial descendants, but also to his spiritual descendants, believers from all nations who profess a faith like Abraham's. (Rom 4:16) Thus, from the perspective of divine grace, the election of Abraham and of national Israel was not an end in itself. It was God's plan for extending his redemptive designs to all believers, from all nations. In extending his grace to Abraham, God was establishing the beginnings of the church, the community of grace.<sup>103</sup>

God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ makes it possible for God to forgive sinners and to gather them in the church, the new covenant community. During his ministry, Jesus repeatedly pronounced the words of forgiveness on a great number of sinners and ministered God's benevolent succor to a variety of desperate human needs. Through teachings such as the father's forgiveness of the prodigal son and the search for the lost sheep, Jesus made it clear that he had come to seek and save those who were lost. But ultimately, it was his redemptive death on the cross that opened wide the gate of salvation for repentant sinners to find access to God's forgiving and restorative grace. This simple truth is formulated in the doctrine of justification by faith through grace. (Rom 3:23; Ti 3:7) According to this teaching, God's gracious provision of the substitutionary death of Christ enables him to pronounce a verdict of "just" or "not guilty" on repentant sinners and to include them in his eternal purposes. As a result, they enter

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<sup>103</sup> Elwell .234

into the realm of God's gracious activity, which enables them to implement the process of individual sanctification in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.<sup>104</sup>

God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ makes it also possible for God to bestow on believers undeserved benefits that enrich their lives and unite them together in the church, the body of Christ. Their acceptance on the basis of grace endows them with a new status as children of God, members of the household of God, so that they relate to him as to their heavenly father. (Gal 4:4–6) Consequently, they become members of a community where race, class, and sex distinctions are irrelevant since they all became equal inheritors of God's age-long promise to Abraham of universal blessing. (3:28, 29) In order to enrich their individual lives and to assure the usefulness of their participation in the life of the new community, the Holy Spirit graciously energizes believers with a variety of gifts for the performance of ministries designed to benefit the church. (Rom 12:6–8) Foremost among those ministries is that of apostle, itself closely linked to God's gracious provision (1:5, 15:15, 16) since it combines with the ministry of the prophets of old to provide the foundational structure of the church. (Eph 2:20) Because the riches of divine grace are freely lavished upon believers in their community life upon earth, (1:7, 8) the church translated into eternity will demonstrate, by its very existence, the immeasurable riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ. (2:6)

Since the grace of Jesus Christ constitutes the existential context of the lives and relationships of believers, they are exhorted not to pervert the grace of God into ungodly practice (Jude 4) but instead to grow in the grace of the Lord. (2 Pt 3:18)

Because Christ represents the fulfillment, the embodiment, and the dispenser of divine grace, the early Christians freely referred to God's grace as "the grace of our Lord

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<sup>104</sup> Elwell. 156.

Jesus Christ.” This grace was conceived as being so basic and so pervasive to their individual lives and to the existence of their communities of faith that they naturally coupled the traditional greeting of *shalom* (“peace”) with a reference to the grace of Jesus Christ. This is the reason for the ubiquitous repetition of numerous variations on the basic greeting formula found in almost every book of the NT, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with you all.” (2 Thes 3:18)

Liberation theology is a balanced study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ.<sup>105</sup> It is true that God meets us in the human situation, not as an idea or concept that is self-evidently true. Cone declares “God encounters us in the human condition as the liberator of the poor and the weak, empowering them to fight for freedom because they were made for it. Although God is the intended subject of theology, God does not do theology. Human beings do theology.”<sup>106</sup>

Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the Gospel, which is Jesus Christ; the sole reason for existence is to put the meaning of God’s activity in the world.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> James H. Cone, *a Black Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 1.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. xx1.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 1.



In view of the biblical tradition on liberation, it is necessary to define the Christian community as the community of the oppressed which joins Jesus Christ in his fight for the liberation of humankind. In support of this, James H. Cone has written:

The task of theology, then, is to explicate the meaning of God's liberating activity so that those who labor under enslaving powers will see that the forces of liberation are the very activity of God. Christian theology is never just a rational study of the being of God. Rather it is a study of God's liberating activity in the world, God's activity in behalf of the oppressed.<sup>108</sup>

The Christian church is that community of people called into being by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that they can bear witness to Jesus' Lordship by participating with him in the struggle of freedom. Without Jesus Christ the church has no identity. The apostle Paul has referred to the church as the body of Christ. Some theologians would adhere to the claim that every ecclesiological statement is at the same time an Christological statement.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, the church is joined in Christ's desire for everyone to be free.

Jesus Christ is Lord of the church, therefore, the church is his servant. Cone affirms:

It is that congregation of people whose identity as the people of God arises from a definition of servant hood that is derived from Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. By definition, the church exists for others, because its being is determined by the One who died on the cross for others. The servant hood of the church is defined by the cross of Jesus, and nothing else. To be a servant of the crucified One is to be his representative in society, bearing witness (in words, actions, and suffering body) to the kingdom that Jesus revealed in his life, death, and resurrection.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Cone, *a Black Theology of Liberation*. 3.

<sup>109</sup> James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1986), 111,115.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.124.

### *My Perspective*

Theology is the church applying a critical self-evaluation of what it says and does on behalf of the one who defines the church's identity namely, Jesus Christ. We are to live in this world by God's guidance. Dr. Parks in his lecture on Theological Foundations, during one of our intensives, explained that to understand theology, one should consider the life practices. That is the Bio praxis equals God's life practices. He said to study God is to dissect God. If you dissect God, you have to kill God. The same ways you study an animal in a biology laboratory—you dissect the animal. No one can dissect God.<sup>111</sup>

Radical hospitality was extended to me and it made a difference in my life. For a pastor, church leaders and congregation to aid an ex-offender in understanding the spiritual implications of his or her experience, it is important for them to understand the context of the prison system.

Prisons have undergone transformations throughout centuries, yet that transformation seems to elude ex-offenders as recidivism is still high in America today. It is my belief that, like the prison system, an individual, especially an African-American male ex-offender, can transform his life and that this is done through the Christian community extending radical hospitality.

An ex-offender must unlearn what he or she has learned throughout his or her life. Author Carter G. Woodson touches upon this topic in his book, *"Mis-Education of the Negro,"* which addresses the educational system as a failure to African-Americans. As a result one must focus on changing their thinking and learning.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Dr. Parks at one of the Intensives at United Theology Seminary lecturing on Theology.

<sup>112</sup> Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. (Washington, D.C.: Tribeca Books, 2013), 1-129.

These lessons can be applied to the contextual ministry as a chaplain in a minimum security prison for men in Madison County, Ohio. If an ex-offender can be acclimated into a Christian community offering radical hospitality, recidivism can decrease.

However, when the offenders leave prison, there is little or no support from the Christian communities to keep them from returning to prison. Based on my experience as a prison chaplain, it is my belief that God can transform the lives of ex-offenders, but first the ex-offender must be willing to make the change with support from the Christian communities when they are released from prison.

What an amazing opportunity the Christian communities have as the body of Christ! A chance to make a difference for God in a desperately hurting world, and to react in ways that honor God; to bless others by serving them gladly with practical expressions of God's love.

In early church history, the role of the church bordered on reformation. In other words, the church did not sit idle by and watch the suffering of its people, but eventually took an active role in the social and political well-being of people. Some of the atrocities that were committed by the Roman Catholic Church caused a reformation that literally changed the expectation and the role the future church would play. The church would realize its role and the need to redefine its role with the ever-changing patterns of time.

The church is called to help people, especially those in need. Max Lucado argues that there are several reasons to help people in need. But for the Christians, none is higher

than this, “when we love those in need, we are loving Jesus. But it is a message that Jesus made crystal clear, when we love them, we love him.”<sup>113</sup>

The Jerusalem church understood this very well. How else can we explain their explosion across the world? It began on Pentecost with the 120 disciples spilled into every corner of the world, reaching Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, and to the end of the earth. There is no conclusion at the end of the book of Acts because the work has not been finished.

The biblical perspective of this project from the Old and New Testament literature has been explained. It was noticed that the Bible is the story of creation, the rebellion of humanity, the election and covenant with Israel, the coming of the Messiah, the reconciliation of God and humanity, the birth of the church as God’s instrument in the divine mission to the world, and the gift of the Spirit as the promise of final fulfillment.

The teachings and practices of my denomination, The United Methodist Church, relating to radical hospitality were discussed. The United Methodist Church has a lengthy history of concern for social justice. The social creed and social principles speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation, rooted in the traditions of The United Methodist Church.

John Wesley was indeed concerned for the salvation and the reformation of the lost. He had no systemic plan to confront the existing criminal justice system, but he sympathized with some lawbreakers, challenged prison conditions, and praised John Howard, the father of prison reforms. Three themes summarized this Wesleyan sense of mission. First, Wesleyan concerns for reform and holiness required a restorative vision; second, a mission seeking to make disciples, person learning, growing and living as

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<sup>113</sup> Max Lucado, *Live to Make a Difference*, Bklt ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 37.

responsible Christians; and third, a mission motivated by redemptive grace which responds to God's love with a grateful effort to be lovingly gracious in seeking wholeness for the total person, even when persons do not receive the gospel message. The United Methodist Church believes that hospitality is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Two major doctrinal themes corroborate the foundation of this project: redemptive grace and liberation theology. The doctrine of grace pertains to God's activity rather than to God's nature. Grace is to be understood in terms of a dynamic expression of the divine personality rather than as a static attribute of God's nature. Grace is the dimension of divine activity that enables God to confront human indifference and rebellion with an inexhaustible capacity to forgive and bless.

Liberation theology is a balanced study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. God encounters us in the human condition as the liberator of the poor and the weak, empowering them to fight for freedom because they were made for it. Human beings are the ones who do theology.

Theology is defined as the full presence of God in human life experiences. Human experiences involve both good and evil and God is in both. When it comes to the latter, correction and imprisonment may come into play and it is the task of the ex-offender to understand God's presence in his or her experience. The Christian communities have been summoned by God to provide radical hospitality to all strangers, including "returning citizens" from prisons.

Every Christian and non-Christian has a belief about the existence or non-existence of God. They attempt to explain God and God's ways. Owen C. Thomas

and Ellen K. Wondra define theology as “the methodical analysis and derived understanding of a Christian’s belief system.”<sup>114</sup> Although no theology will ever fully explain God, the Bible is an attempt to understand God and the way God revealed God’s-self. God does not reveal God’s-self all at once, but in various ways to people and sometimes for specific reasons. According to Hebrews 1:1-2, “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.”<sup>115</sup> The church’s understanding of God is always expanding and deepening. The purpose of theology is “the interpretation and application of the Christian faith in a particular time and place, with the context’s own challenges and insights.” Therefore, theology is not a luxury but is necessary in the life of the church.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas and Wondra, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>116</sup> Thomas and Wondra, 2.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this project is to develop, and evaluate the implementation of a training manual for church leadership, using the concept of radical hospitality as a tool to address the high recidivism rate of African-American male ex-offenders in the Columbus, Ohio area. At this stage in the research, radical hospitality will be generally defined as going above and beyond the norm, loving others and developing a relationship into the family of Christ. Bishop Schnase has made this concept of radical hospitality famous, and deservedly so. Radical hospitality is not coffee and donuts. It is not a greeter at the door. It is an orientation of our being that sees everyone as a valued guest.<sup>1</sup> The project will use the training material, based on Bishop Schnase's book: *Five Practices of Radical Hospitality*.

#### *Hypothesis*

An understanding of radical hospitality model can have an impact on the attitudes, future policies and practices of church leadership concerning African-American male ex-offenders. This researcher believes that if the attitudes and practices of the church leadership are changed, recidivism can be reduced and ex-offenders can be positively

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<sup>1</sup> Schnase, 9, 10.

impacted. This study is important because it will give hope to the ‘returning citizen’ and transform his life...providing a new life beyond prison walls.

*Research Questions:*

1. Can radical hospitality, used in Christian communities in Columbus, Ohio assist in changing attitudes towards African-American male ex-offenders released from prison?
2. Are there any support systems; such as human capital development and or monetary benefits, for African-American male ex-offenders released from prison?
3. What programs and strategies can be made available to support and develop relationships with African-American male ex-offenders released from prison integrating back into society as useful citizens?

*Problem Statement*

The problem of recidivism is not only a thorny issue for federal and state institutions but to all communities to which these ex-offenders return. Therefore, as a prison chaplain I believe this study and its outcomes can help transform the lives of ex-offenders when they are released from prison. Most importantly, the ex-offender should be willing to make the change with support from the Christian communities when they are released.

Prisons have undergone transformations throughout centuries, yet that transformation seems to elude ex-offenders as recidivism is still high in United States. An individual, especially an African-American male ex-offender, can transform his life through radical hospitality. The Christian community can provide this program. An ex-offender can unlearn the destructive behavior that caused him or her to be imprisoned and then learn how to be a productive citizen throughout his or her life. Author Carter G.



Woodson touches upon this topic in his book, *“Mis-Education of the Negro”* which addresses the educational system as a failure to African Americans.<sup>2</sup> As a result an ex-offender can learn to focus on changing his or her thinking by adapting new wholesome behaviors.

These lessons that were learned can be applied to my contextual ministry as a chaplain in a minimum-security prison for men in Madison County, Ohio. It is my belief that if an ex-offender can be acclimated into a Christian community and offered radical hospitality, then recidivism could be decreased.

However, when the offenders leave prison, there is little or no support from the Christian communities to keep them from returning to prison. As a prison chaplain, I believe that this study and its outcomes can help transform the lives of ex-offenders when they are released from prison. Most importantly, the ex-offender should be willing to make the change with support from the Christian communities after they are released from prison.

The Dayton Daily News reported that the national criminal recidivism rate “remains stubbornly high” despite huge increases in state spending on prison over the past two decades, according to a study issued by the Pew Center on the States. More than four in ten convicts in the United States return to prison within three years, either because they violated their parole or committed new felonies, the Pew Center reported in what it called the “first-ever-state-by-state survey of recidivism rates.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Woodson, 1-129.

<sup>3</sup> DRC Office of Communication, February, 2013.  
<http://www.drc.ohio.gov/Public/press/press424.htm> (Accessed December 10, 2013).

Dr. Ed Rhine, deputy director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, stated that:

Ohio is using such strategies, including better methods of screening inmates for rehabilitative programming and assessing parolees' levels of risk and the seriousness of violations when deciding whether to revoke parole. Dr. Rhine said that those ex-convicts who pose little risk to the public and have committed minor parole violations are now more likely to remain in the community, where they can hold down jobs and have more access to rehabilitation programs.<sup>4</sup>

Director Gary C. Mohr of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections indicated that the department has been pushing to lower offender recidivism and keeping Ohio's communities safe, and this metric is an indicator of the effectiveness of the work the department is doing to change the criminal justice system. About twenty-four [people] came back on new charges, while just [fewer than] 4.7 percent returned on technical violations of post-prison supervision.<sup>5</sup>

Almost half of new inmates have sentences of a year or less. The Pew Center said that the states that are most successful in lowering recidivism are those using what it calls evidence-based strategies that are cheaper than prison and work better in helping ex-offenders remain law-abiding citizens. Usually, when there is no financial, moral family, or community support, ex-offenders will return to prison.<sup>6</sup>

The church, over the years, has failed to fully reach out to ex-offenders and welcome them as "returning citizens." The Christian community desires to come into prisons to provide worship services but will not provide radical hospitality to an ex-

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<sup>4</sup> DRC Office of Communication, February, 2013.  
<http://www.drc.ohio.gov/Public/press/press424.htm> (Accessed December 10, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> DRC Office of Communication, February, 2013.  
<http://www.drc.ohio.gov/Public/press/press424.htm> (Accessed December 10, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.springfieldnewssun.com/news/news/state-regional/ohios-decline-in-prison-recidivism-among-steepes-1/nMqks/-1> (Accessed December 15, 2013).

offender when they leave prison. This practice is one of the reasons ex-offenders released from prisons are returning to prisons at an alarming rate. The Christian community, which is the body of Christ, has neglected the mission of the church to embrace the children of God who are “returning citizens.”<sup>7</sup>

The Christian community faces challenges, fears and setbacks when they do decide to assist ex-offenders when they leave prison. There can be suspicion within the Christian communities that the ex-offender could return to his or her former criminal life style. In addition, not knowing the character or behavior of the ex-offender, there can be growing fear as to what he or she is capable of doing to the members of the Christian communities. The people to whom Jesus spoke knew all about hospitality, it was required from them to be hospitable. But Paul took it further because he understood that Jesus took hospitality further. Radical hospitality means being willing to seek and to save the lost. Radical hospitality means being generous, even sacrificial with that with which God has entrusted us. Radical hospitality means working not only to be hospitable, but working and praying and hoping that those we touch with the power of love will be changed by what we say, or do, or offer in God’s name. Radical hospitality is Christ centered.<sup>8</sup>

### *Research Design*

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<sup>7</sup> Ernest Graves, “*Establishing a religious services program for inmates and community volunteers*” (D.Min Diss., United Theological Seminary, 1995).1-12.

<sup>8</sup><http://www.fairhavenumc.org/en/art/368/> (Accessed November 12, 2014)

During this project, church leaders and lay members were invited to engage in conversations and interactive dialogues about utilizing radical hospitality as a tool to help acclimate African-American male ex-offenders into the community as returning citizens. The sixty-two participants in this project were pastors, assistant pastors, lay church leaders, community leaders and ex-offenders. The ministry model was designed to create an awareness for church leadership to use the concepts and practices of radical hospitality as a tool to welcome ex-offenders returning to the community when released from prison.

Pre-survey and post-survey questionnaires were employed. The study combines open-ended and closed-ended questions with participant observation and extensive interviews of pastors, church laypersons and members of selected churches in the Columbus, Ohio metropolis.

The research study also includes individual and in-depth interviews, journaling with a focus group of ten participants and an all-day workshop with sixty-two participants.

#### *Method of Data Collection and Research Instrument*

Data collection and analysis was triangulated utilizing pre-test surveys and post-test survey questionnaires, interviews, journaling, an all-day workshop and individual in-depth interviews with participants. This was a qualitative research case study.

Qualitative research “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s

setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.”<sup>9</sup> It is a study of things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them.<sup>10</sup>

A qualitative case study research approach that includes pre-tests, post-tests, group interviews, in-depth individual interviews, group sessions and workshop will provide the data for collections, which will be collected by the researcher/study participants and collated.

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<sup>9</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 4, 5.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

This chapter will discuss the results of the methodology conveyed in Chapter Four. Pre-test and post-test surveys, interviews, and journaling were the primary vehicles utilized in analyzing practices and attitudinal changes that occurred, if any, after an all-day workshop presentation.

The problem of recidivism is a complex issue for federal and state institutions as well as to all communities to which African-American male ex-offenders return. As a prison chaplain, it is my belief that this study and its outcomes can help transform the lives of African-American male ex-offenders when they are released from prison. Most importantly, the ex-offender must be willing to accept support from the Christian community after they are released to assist them through the process.

Prisons have undergone transformations throughout centuries, yet these transformations seem to elude ex-offenders as recidivism is still high in the United States.

#### **Project Purpose**

My purpose was to develop, and evaluate the implementation of a training manual for church leadership, using the concept of radical hospitality as a tool to address the high recidivism rate of African-American male ex-offenders in the Columbus, Ohio area.

Radical hospitality is going above and beyond the normal way of welcoming and

entertaining the stranger. It is loving others and developing a relationship with the family of Christ. United Methodist Bishop Schnase has made this concept of radical hospitality famous, and deservedly so. Radical hospitality is not only offering a visitor coffee and donuts. It is not a greeter at the door. It is an orientation of our being—seeing everyone as a valued guest.

### **Project Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of this ministry project (justice and mercy) is if church leadership can understand a radical hospitality model it can have an impact on the attitudes, future policies and practices of concerning African-American male ex-offenders. It is my belief that if the attitudes and practices of the church leadership are changed, recidivism can be reduced and ex-offenders can be positively impacted. This study is important because it will give hope to the “returning citizen” and can transform his life. It will provide a new life beyond prison walls.

### **Project Measurements/Goals and/or Objectives**

- Church leadership understanding biblical knowledge and its use regarding radical hospitality when working with African-American male ex-offenders.
- Church leadership developing positive attitudes and practices regarding radical hospitality as a valid tool to minister to African-American male ex-offenders to address and potentially reduce recidivism.
- Church leaders developing competencies in teaching ex-offenders the skills of radical hospitality as a means to help reduce recidivism and to begin to rebuild their damaged relationships with family, friends and God.
- Church leaders developing the competencies to use radical hospitality as a tool to design programs and activities that can change church leadership's

thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male ex-offenders.

### **Project Implementation**

During this project, church leaders and lay members were invited to engage in conversations and interactive dialogues about utilizing radical hospitality as a tool to help acclimate African-American male ex-offenders into the community as returning citizens. The sixty-two participants in this project were pastors, assistant pastors, lay church leaders, community leaders and ex-offenders. The ministry model was designed to create awareness for church leadership to use the concepts and practices of radical hospitality as a tool to welcome ex-offenders returning to the community when released from prison.

Pre-survey and post-survey questionnaires were employed. The study combined open-ended and closed-ended questions with participant observation and extensive interviews of pastors, church laypersons and members of selected churches in the Columbus, Ohio metropolis.

The research study also included individual and in-depth interviews, journaling with a focus group of ten participants and an all-day workshop with sixty-two participants.

### **Method of Data Collection and Research Instrument**

Data collection and analysis was triangulated utilizing pre-test surveys and post-test survey questionnaire, interviews, journaling, an all-day videotape workshop and individual in-depth interviews with participants. This was a qualitative research case study.



Qualitative research “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.”<sup>1</sup> It is a study of things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them.<sup>2</sup>

A qualitative case study research approach that includes pre-tests, post-tests, group interviews, in-depth individual interviews, group sessions and workshop provided the data for collections, collected by the researcher/study participants and collated.

### **Pre-Test Survey Questionnaire**

The pre-test questionnaire was given for this project and was administered to sixty-two participants. The pre-test consisted of ten questions of personal beliefs, perceptions and attitudes, both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was distributed to gain input from the participants about their knowledge of radical hospitality and how this concept can be utilized as a tool to reduce the high rate of recidivism of African-American male ex-offenders. (See Appendix A)

Participants were composed of fifteen black females and twenty-five black men, ten white women and twelve white men. The participants were interested in the study and

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<sup>1</sup> Creswell, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, 4, 5.

expressed strong feelings of concerns for the incarcerated and people returning to the community from prison.

### **Group/Individual Interviews**

These interviews were most helpful in establishing a rapport with church leaders, members of the community and ex-offenders. Interview questions answered by the participants were the following:

- a) How do you describe your feelings about radical hospitality to ex-offenders returning from prisons?
- b) In what ways do you plan to use the practice of radical hospitality in your church, workplace, and your community?
- c) What do you think will rebuild broken relationships with ex-offenders and their family, friends and God?
- d) Are there any other tools you think the Christian community can utilize to change the thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics they may have towards African–American male ex-offenders?

### **Journaling**

A weekly Sunday morning meeting, from 9:15 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. was held at the Church of All People, Columbus, Ohio. This group is the New Beginning support group for not only ex-offenders, but also for volunteers and those that have a passion for prison ministry.

The journaling took place over a four-week period from August 10, 2014 through August 31, 2014. This group was composed of an average of ten to twelve men who met to discuss what they had experienced during the week. They wanted to better understand their own point of view as well as what others may think of a situation. It was interesting

to hear their stories about challenges and success. Half of the group was looking for employment and finding it very difficult to find a job because of their felony records. The other half had jobs and were mostly self-employed. They expressed frustrations over the fact that they could not find adequate housing and some were sleeping in churches and abandoned buildings because they could not afford paying for rent. After much discussion within the group, we decided to journal because writing in a journal is an effective tool for use in the healing process.

### **All-Day Workshop**

An all-day videotape workshop (Justice and Mercy) was developed as an opportunity to engage a larger segment of the community in learning and providing greater awareness of the practices and values of radical hospitality as a tool to reduce the high rate of recidivism among African-American male ex-offenders in Columbus, Ohio. United Methodist Church for All People was the site for the workshop. The pastors, officers and members were very much engaged in the behind the scene preparation for this workshop which was held on August 9, 2014. They provided and had a free breakfast and lunch prepared at the church at no cost to the sixty-two participants. Office supplies, pencils, easels, poster papers and needed items were provided by the church at no cost.

The workshop began with registration and breakfast after everyone was welcomed and prayers were offered by the host pastor. Following prayers, a three and a half minute video from Beauty and the Beast entitled “Be Our Guest” was played. This was an introductory video on radical hospitality. It was written by composer Alan Menken and lyricist Howard Ashman for Walt Disney Pictures’ 30<sup>th</sup> animated feature film, 1991. “Be

Our Guest”, a Broadway musical-inspired song, takes place within the first half of Beauty and the Beast in the style of a large-scale musical number by the castle’s staff of enchanted servants sung to Belle in an attempt to make her feel welcome. It is a vibrant musical number that takes place shortly after Belle, having just recently sacrificed her own freedom in return for her father’s, is imprisoned by the Beast and subsequently confined to her bedroom. Hungry, Belle soon ventures into the kitchen, where she is greeted by Lumiere. Immediately, Lumiere leads Mrs. Potts, Cogsworth and the castle’s staff of enchanted objects in an elaborate production number—an attempt to officially welcome Belle to the Beast’s castle, warmly inviting the character to literally “be [their] guest.”

### **Session I: What the Bible says about radical hospitality?**

A long time prison volunteer and one of my context associates, presented the first session on what the Bible says about radical hospitality. He also defined and spoke about “what is neighborly love” and how it ties in with radical hospitality. The following scriptures were presented and discussed:

- a) Genesis 18: 1-15
- b) Matthew 25: 31-46
- e) Romans 15:7
- f) Hebrews 13: 1-10

During the group discussion that lasted for approximately 30 minutes, the participants were divided in sub-groups of six or more people at a table. In their discussion, the following questions were to be addressed:

- a) Which verses speak most loudly to you? Why?
- b) In your own words, how would you define or explain “hospitality?”
- c) Why do you think we sometimes are reluctant to offer hospitality to others? As Christians, what should be our motivation for practicing hospitality?

After the group discussion, there was a time for brainstorming. The participants were reminded that there is no right or wrong response; every response is valid. They were instructed to write all ideas on a chart (to be kept for future reference). The participants had to brainstorm ideas in response to the following questions:

- a) What else can you do to make your church more inviting and welcoming?
- b) What are some short-term solutions you can act on immediately and without great cost?
- c) What are some larger and longer-term solutions to consider?

Prayers were said by the context associate to end this first session and a bathroom break that lasted for ten minutes.

## **Session II: What is radical hospitality?**

The senior pastor of the United Methodist Church for All People on Parsons Avenue, Columbus, Ohio and the husband (a retired professor of The Methodist School of Theology in Ohio) of the pastor of New Life United Methodist Church on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Columbus, Ohio, were the presenters. They shared their understanding of the biblical meaning of hospitality from the Greek and how radical hospitality is being practiced at their respective churches. It was noted that in the Greek language, hospitality is *philaxenia* and *philaxenia* means love the stranger. They explained that the city of brotherly love, Philadelphia, as an example of radical hospitality. This is the guiding

principle, they emphasized, of how ministry is being practiced at the Church for All People and at New Life.

They emphasized that radical hospitality is not just the welcome, but the thing that surprises people the most is the fact that there are no eligibility requirements for the free store, medical services and breakfast at both churches. All are welcomed regardless of race, religion, social status or sexual orientation.

It was argued that the concept of radical hospitality is not complicated, yet it is difficult to implement because people are called to share the love of God with others who sometimes will not exhibit any sense of gratitude.

A group discussion followed the presentations by these two distinguished United Methodist pastors. In the participant's small group, they selected the following questions that they wanted to explore:

- What is "radical" hospitality? How is it different from ordinary hospitality?
- How are churches characterized by radical hospitality different from other churches?
- In what ways do you invite people outside the community of faith into the body of Christ?

At this junction, the Sheriff of Franklin County who requested to be one of the presenters informed us that law enforcement would like to partner with the Christian community to help reduce the high rate of recidivism in Franklin County, Ohio. He indicated that his office has embarked upon a new program of direct supervision of offenders to cut down on recidivism. He said that he has observed that those persons committing felonies return to them more often than those who are committing

misdeemeanors. The sheriff asked for prayers and support from church leaders to help law enforcement tackle this epidemic of crimes in the county.

Immediately following this session lunch was served. One of the pastors at the host church said the blessings for the food. Participants continued the discussion around the lunch table.

### **Session III: What Can You Do?**

The following scriptures were read:

- “Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” (Matthew 22:9)
- “Come and See.” (John 1:39a)

The first scripture is about the King inviting everyone to the wedding banquet and the second scripture is inviting the disciples to come and see where Christ was staying. The disciples hung out the entire day with Jesus as he went about his Father’s business. The context associate who was scheduled to make this presentation could not be at the workshop because at the last minute, his father became critically ill and he had to be with him at the hospital. His presentation was titled “Opportunities for Individual Change: Opportunities for New Direction-Reentry Services.” Following the workshop we were able to get a video interview with him at his office. However, another context associate was ready to present this session on what you can do. The following questions were selected by the group for discussion:

- How are you doing in training, teaching and preparing your greeters and ushers? How could you do better?

- How can you be more intentional, strategic and frequent in your communication to the public about your church and ministries? How might you make your communications more “visitor friendly?”
- What can you do to make Christian invitation and welcome a vital part of the culture of your church and an expectation of every member and group?

After the discussion, it was time for brainstorming and again participants were reminded that there is no right or wrong responses; every response is valid, and that they are not to critique or discuss ideas as they are presented. They were asked to brainstorm ideas in response to the following questions:

- What kinds of activities could you do that, if done with excellence and consistency, would have a tremendous impact on making your congregation one that shows radical hospitality?
- What are some basic, reasonable changes or actions that your team, with the help of the congregation, could take on?
- What are some big, life-changing, seriously scary ideas that your team, with the help of the congregation, could take on?

At the conclusion of this third session, prayers were said and we took a fifteen minute bathroom break.

#### **Session IV: Creating a Plan**

More time was allotted for this final planning session—up to two hours. We had prayers and scripture reading for about three to five minutes. The following questions were helpful in this process of planning:

- What ideas are based on personal response from every member?
- Which ideas are within the ministry parameters of specific small groups and teams now?
- Which ideas are strategic, require decisions and significant funding, and should be part of a structured planning process?



Following the discussion of these questions, it was time to commit the ideas to paper. Each group summarized three to five best ideas and had specific goals. They had to prioritize what they wanted to do, assign some specific tasks, decide when they would like to do it, and determine how to share the results.

### **Post-Test Survey Questionnaire**

The post-test questionnaire was administered to see if there were any changes in the attitudes, awareness and perceptions of participants after sitting through the workshop. Eighty-five percent responded positively that the workshop changed their perception and attitude toward persons who have been convicted of criminal offenses and incarcerated. When questioned if biblical teachings on radical hospitality are essential for ex-offenders returning to the community, eighty-five percent strongly agreed while only fifteen percent were not sure. Compared to the pre-test results, this was a significant change as to the importance of biblical teachings in understanding the meaning of radical hospitality to the stranger, especially the stranger, just from prison, God sends knocking at your front door. (See Appendix B)

### **Results of the Study**

Data collection and analysis was triangulated utilizing pre-test surveys and post-test survey questionnaires, interviews, journaling, an all-day workshop and individual in-depth interviews with participants. This was a qualitative research case study.

## Goal I

Church leadership understanding biblical knowledge and its use about radical hospitality when working with African-American male ex-offenders.

### *Major Finding*

Church leaders did find that understanding biblical knowledge and its use about radical hospitality offered encouragement and examples when working with African-American male ex-offenders. In the scriptures the reader hears of the authentic work of God and how God was present throughout history offering life and forgiveness. This is essential for ex-offenders, especially African-American males returning from prison to the community.

For example participant #5 when asked which scripture spoke loudly to him and why? He answered that Hebrews 13:1-10 spoke loudly to him because of the need to keep on loving each other as brothers and not forgetting to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. In addition it alluded to the fact that we should remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Seventy-five percent of the pre-test survey participants strongly agreed that biblical teachings on radical hospitality are essential for ex-offenders, especially African-American males returning from prison to the community, while only twenty percent agreed, and five percent disagreed.

Sixty percent of the all-day workshop participants reported that the following scriptures spoke loudly to them for being inclusive and transformative:

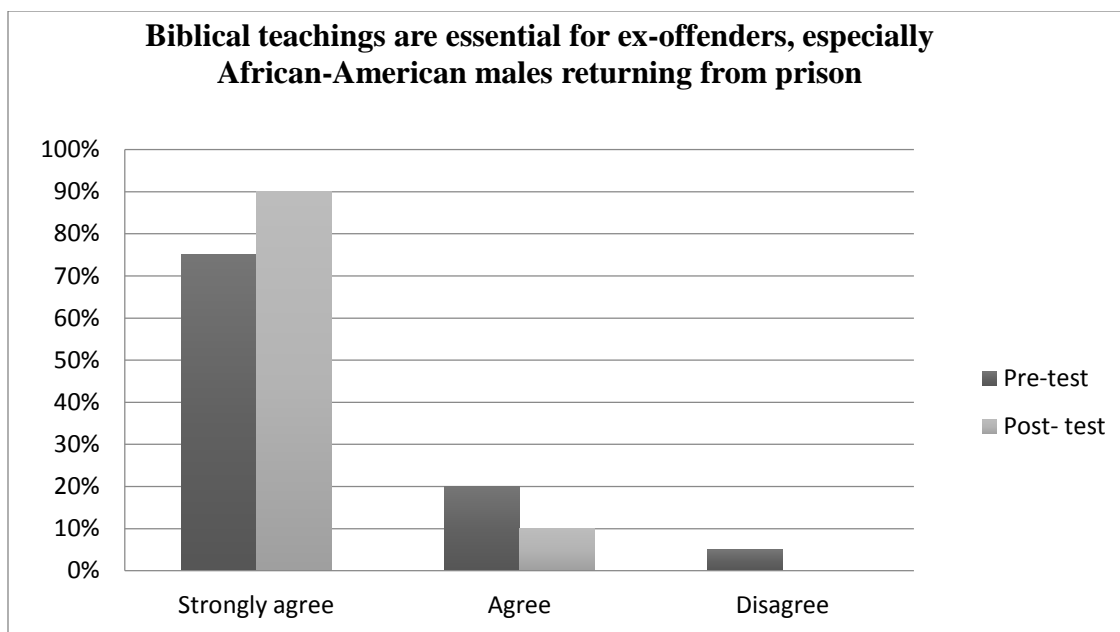
- a) Genesis 18:1-15
- b) Matthew 25:31-46
- c) Romans 15:7
- d) Hebrews 13:1-10

For example participant #8 when asked which scripture spoke loudly to her and why? She responded that Genesis 18:1-15 because this scripture talks about the three visitors that visited Abraham while in the dessert. Abraham was very inclusive, hospitable and a great host to his strange guests. He made them feel very welcomed in his tent.

Forty percent of the all-day workshop participants indicated that the scriptures did not speak loudly nor fully explained for understanding the connection relating to radical hospitality.

For example participant #7 when asked which scripture spoke loudly to him and why? He responded that all the scriptures presented and discussed spoke loudly to him because they informed him that radical hospitality is biblically based.

Ninety percent of the post-test survey participants strongly agreed that biblical teachings on radical hospitality are essential for ex-offenders, especially African-American male returning from prison to the community, while only ten percent agreed, and none disagreed.



## Goal II

Church leadership developing positive attitudes and practices regarding radical hospitality as a valid tool to minister to African-American male ex-offenders to address and potentially reduce recidivism.

### *Major Finding*

Church leadership did find positive attitudes and practices regarding radical hospitality as a valid tool to minister to African-American male ex-offenders to address and potentially reduce recidivism.

The participants learned that persons convicted of felony offenses are not second class citizens for the rest of their lives and can be accepted, forgiven and welcomed back into society and shown radical hospitality.

Questions 7 and 10 on the pre-test survey questionnaire asked if participants thought that those convicted of felonies are second class citizens for the rest of their lives; and can one accept, forgive and welcome any stranger, especially a convicted criminal?

For example participant #11 when asked “do you believe that those convicted of felonies are second class citizens for the rest of their lives?” He responded that he disagreed and could accept, forgive and welcome any stranger, especially a convicted criminal.

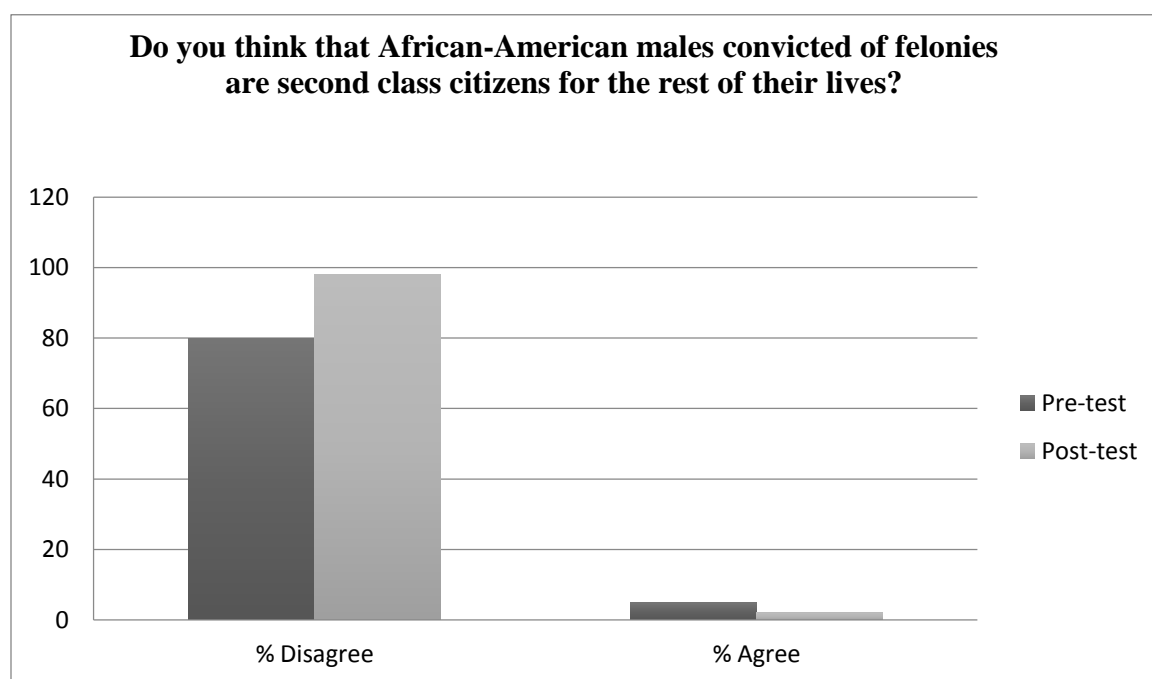
Eighty percent disagreed that those convicted of felonies are second-class citizens for the rest of their lives and could accept, forgive or welcome any stranger, especially a convicted criminal. Fifteen percent responded that they were not sure, while five percent were sure the convicted criminals were second class citizens for the rest of their lives and therefore could not accept, forgive nor welcome them.

For example participant #2 when asked if she thought that those convicted of felonies are second class citizens for the rest of their lives; and can she accept, forgive or welcome any stranger? She responded that she was not sure.

Sixty-six percent of the participants from the group/individual interviews described positive attitudes and practices toward ex-offenders. They felt that ex-offenders deserve a chance to live in a society that is supportive, kind and non-judgmental. They expressed the fact that ex-offenders need to be treated as human beings and made to feel that someone honestly cares about their success in the world. Twenty percent described negative attitudes and practices toward ex-offenders and felt that they did not deserve a chance to live in a society that is supportive, kind and non-judgmental. Fourteen percent were not sure if ex-offenders convicted of felonies are second class citizens.

Following the all-day workshop, the post-test survey results indicated that ninety-eight percent of participants disagreed that convicted criminals are second class citizens for the rest of their lives and could be accepted, forgiven and welcomed while two percent did not agree.

For example participant #3 when asked if he thought that convicted criminals are second class citizens for the rest of their lives and could be accepted, forgiven and welcomed? He responded in the negative.



### Goal III

Church leaders developing competencies in teaching ex-offenders the skills of radical hospitality as a means to help reduce recidivism and to begin to rebuild their damaged relationships with family, friends and God.

### *Major Finding*

Church leaders did find that developing competencies in teaching ex-offenders skills of radical hospitality will help reduce recidivism and rebuild their damaged relationships with family, friends and God. Education programming for change, support groups, mentoring and prayers will also help rebuild broken relationships with ex-offenders and their family, friends and God.

The pre-test survey results indicated that ninety-two percent said that education, programming for change, support groups, mentoring and prayers will help to rebuild broken relationships between ex-offenders and their family, friends and God. It was also noted that this process should begin while the offender is in prison and continue when released from prison. Time is a major factor as members of the church and community learns to trust and understand that ex-offenders are children of God. Eight percent strongly disagreed that programming or mentoring will help reduce recidivism and begin to rebuild the damaged relationships with the ex-offenders' family, friends and God.

For example participant #15 when asked what you think will rebuild broken relationships with ex-offenders and their families, friends and God. She responded that understanding, education, mentoring, prayers and counseling will help build broken relationships with ex-offenders and their families, friends and God.

Fifty-nine percent of the participants from the group/individual interviews agreed that education, programming for change, support groups, mentoring and prayers will help to rebuild broken relationships with ex-offenders and their families, friends and God.

The most effective type of approach involves the community helping an offender change unhealthy thinking patterns, understanding factors linked to the offender's

offending and developing effective coping skills. Fifty-one percent indicated that they will raise awareness by educating the public about how an ex-offender is able to change because there is often too much negative publicity and news reports about them.

For example participant #19 when asked what will help to rebuild broken relationships with ex-offenders and their families, friends and God? He responded that establishing a relationship with God first will be fundamental in mending broken relationships with family and friends.

Seventy percent of the participants in their journal entries reported that they had no problem forgiving their family members who were 'returning citizens' and ready to rebuild their broken relationships. This attitude was attributed to their family upbringing, family traditions and training. They understood what the Holy Scriptures say about forgiveness as expressed in the Lord's prayers. However, thirty percent described the following as issues which they face in attempting to forgive people who have wronged them:

- Difficulty understanding what happened and not knowing how to begin the process.
- Difficulty reconsidering how the events happened from the other person's point of view.
- It is hard to let go of hurt or anger and feelings of being hurt again
- Experiencing a type of power and being honest about it.

The post-test survey results revealed that ninety-five percent of the participants agreed that education, programming for change, support groups, mentoring and prayers will help to rebuild broken relationships with ex-offenders and their families, friends and God, while only five percent strongly disagreed.



For example participant # 22 when asked what will help rebuild broken relationships with ex-offenders and their families, friends and God, she responded that the need to forgive and reconcile differences is crucial to begin the healing process for the rebuilding of a meaningful relationship.

#### **Goal IV**

Church leaders developing the competencies to use radical hospitality as a tool to design programs and activities that can change church leadership's thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male ex-offenders.

#### *Major Finding*

Church leaders did find that developing competencies to use radical hospitality as a tool to design programs and actives can change church leadership's thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male-offenders.

Seventy-six percent of the participants from the all-day workshop responded that church leaders can develop competencies to use radical hospitality as a tool to design programs and activities that can change church leadership's thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male ex-offenders. It was suggested that church leaders can do the following to practice radical hospitality:

- Be Christ-like - positive attitude towards ex-offenders
- Stand against disrespect to ex-offenders
- Pray for law enforcement personnel
- Offer discipleship training

- Listen/love in order to offer support
- Provide transportation for work/doctor visits/shopping
- Educate to eliminate fears and dis-trust
- Change ways of thinking about returning citizens from prison
- Positive reinforcement to sustain the change made in ex-offenders
- Create prison ministries in churches

Twenty-four percent did not agree that church leaders can develop competencies to use radical hospitality as a tool to design programs and activities that can change church leadership's thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male ex-offenders.

Eighty-three percent of the participants in the group/individual interviews agreed to design practical programs and activities for church leaders to develop positive behavioral characteristics to minimize their thinking errors towards African- American male ex-offenders. Seventeen percent were not ready to design any program or activities to change the church leadership's thinking errors or negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male ex-offenders.

For example participant # 26 when asked if church leaders can develop competencies to use radical hospitality as a tool to design programs and activities that can change their thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male ex-offenders he responded in the affirmative.

Seventy-eight percent of participants responded positively to the journaling question about their feelings on church leaders developing competencies to use radical hospitality as a tool to design programs and activities that can change their thinking errors

and negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male ex-offenders. Twenty-two percent responded negatively.

For example participant # 25 when asked to describe how he experienced radical hospitality as a gracious invitation and welcome of Christ to strangers, especially as a returning citizen, he responded negatively. He stated that none of the five churches he visited and asked for assistance helped him when he was released from prison

This project was launched on July 6, 2014 and continued through September 28, 2014 (thirteen weeks). This chapter is a data analysis of the field experience resulting from implementation of the project. Specific statements were used as items and the themes for scales to create a survey instrument grounded on the views of the participants. Themes and statements of specific items from the participants were obtained to describe the series of steps taken to check the validity of the findings.

Data collection commenced during the thirteen-week period. The study included: a qualitative case study research approach with pre-test survey, post-test survey, group interviews, in-depth individual interviews, journaling, and an all-day workshop, providing data for collections by the researcher/study participants and collated.

Implementation took place at the United Methodist Church for All People, 946 Parsons Avenue, Columbus, Ohio, where the practice of radical hospitality, the ministry model, is an objective of this Justice and Mercy project. This change occurred after the researcher suffered congestive heart failure in August 2013 and was placed on medical disability leave from his job as chaplain with the Madison Correctional Institution. The pastor, officers and members of this church were gracious and kind to allow him to continue this study with them.

On July 6, 2014, letters of invitation were sent out to approximately 120 prospective participants for this study (ex-offenders, prison volunteers, pastors, ordained and lay, lay members and law enforcement administrators). Sixty-two persons responded to invitation and were able to participate in the study. Data triangulation was used to satisfy criteria for validity in this research study. More than three sources of data information from pre-test and post-test surveys questionnaire, interviews, journaling and an all-day workshop were utilized in the analysis of the data. In addition, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with church leaders who attended the all-day workshop to gain insight on what they perceived as outcomes of the project. Findings from each evaluator were compared and no significant differences in findings were found.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION**

#### **Summary of Research Project**

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, YOU ARE A LEADER.

~ John Quincy Adams

This outstanding award project<sup>1</sup> has allowed me to learn and share in authentic and meaningful ways with all the participants who were seeking new ways in learning how to utilize the tools of radical hospitality in engaging returning citizens and help in the reduction of recidivism. The results of this project were very helpful in grasping some of the difficult issues surrounding the practices of radical hospitality within the Christian community. Church leaders did find that understanding biblical knowledge about radical hospitality offered encouragement and examples when working with African-American male ex-offenders. In the scriptures the reader hears of the authentic work of God and how God was present throughout history offering life and forgiveness. This is essential for ex-offenders, especially African-American males returning from prison to the community. Church leadership did find positive attitudes and practices regarding radical hospitality as a valid tool to minister to African-American male ex-offenders to address and potentially reduce recidivism.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

The participants learned that African-American males convicted of felony offenses are not seen as second class citizens for the rest of their lives and can be accepted, forgiven and welcomed back into society and shown radical hospitality.

Church leadership discovered that developing competencies in teaching African-American male ex-offenders skills of radical hospitality will help reduce recidivism and rebuild their damaged relationships with families, friends and God. Education programming for change, support groups, mentoring and prayers will also help rebuild broken relationships with ex-offenders and their family, friends and God. Church leaders did find that developing competencies to use radical hospitality as a tool to design programs and activities can change church leadership's thinking errors and negative behavioral characteristics towards African-American male-offenders.

### **Suggested Changes and Modifications**

More than a one all-day workshop would have been beneficial to the project if there had been more time. Several interactive sessions were curtailed to accommodate the time that was allotted. Two of the pastors and three of the lay members of the churches that participated requested me to conduct future workshops with their respective congregations.

It was my desire to reach as many church folks in leadership positions but only sixty-two responded and were in attendance during this project. One-to-one engagements with participants were limited because of the time factor.

Adequate time for follow-ups with participants could have enhanced the collection of valuable disclosures about fears and skepticism people have about

ex-offenders released from incarceration. The participants and church community leaders were cooperative in sharing their feelings, visions and experiences to improve the learning process.

### **Writer's Reflection of Radical Hospitality and Christian Community**

As Christians, it is necessary for us to embrace ex-offenders and proclaim to them the restoration that God offers through the Son. God is teaching believers to consider ex-offenders as children of God who need to be reunited into the family of God. All those who are believers can serve as catalysts to resurrect the God in them. God has the power to reform an ex-offender and has commanded us through the biblical instructions to be a neighbor to our brothers and sisters through the practices of radical hospitality.

As an expression of the prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ, He exposed a significant flaw in pharisaical religion. The Pharisees were more exclusionary—less welcoming—than God. They erected boundary markers that kept people out, rather than let people in. By failing to be inclusive, they failed to live a kingdom life in a fallen world. Jesus calls us to greet others with a warm welcome. Our greeting is deeply influenced by the grace we have experienced in Christ. Instead of erecting boundaries to keep people out, we are to remove obstacles to people's participation in God's kingdom community. Instead of boundaries, we focus on the center. All are welcome, for there is "neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, but all are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). In contrast to exclusionary religion, Jesus Christ calls us to no less than the practice of radical hospitality.

Radical means “getting to the root” or “arising from the source.” It also communicates the meaning of “exceeding ordinary practice.” One who is radically committed to something goes beyond the norm, exceeding ordinary expectations. As the Christian community has been called to be practitioners of radical hospitality, it must go the second mile, to “take welcoming the stranger to the max.”<sup>2</sup>

Hospitality has to do with making space for others. It removes obstacles to participation. It holds a welcome sign to all. It is characterized by the open arms of Christ. Vacek summarizes it well, “Hospitable love cares enough to create space in the life of a person in order to welcome another in.”<sup>3</sup>

We so often associate welcoming hospitality with the modern language of inclusivity. This is helpful language, but it does not have the advantage of connecting us to biblical language. Theologian Douglas John Hall recommends, “instead of using the liberal language of inclusivity to describe the Christian alternative to being exclusive, then, I would propose we adopt the biblical language of hospitality.”<sup>4</sup> As an expression of loving God with all our heart and soul, the scriptures exhort ancient Israel to “love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:19) Israel knew what it was like to be a stranger in a foreign land—both in their slavery in Egypt and their experience in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

The examples of Jesus Christ reveal that radical hospitality should be extended to all people—including sinners, strangers and ex-offenders. Jesus was condemned by the

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<sup>2</sup> Schnase, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Why Christian? For Those on the Edge of Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 147.



religious community because he “welcomed sinners and ate with them.” (Luke 15:2)

Contrary to popular understanding, loving, welcoming, and eating with wicked people does not make you like the sinners, it makes you like our loving, merciful God. We seek to practice radical hospitality because we follow the Lord who applauded the fact that when we welcome strangers we are, in reality, welcoming Jesus. “I was a stranger and you welcomed me... whatever you do for the least of these, you have done unto me.” (Matthew 25:35)

Radical hospitality reveals an openness to others. It welcomes others into our world, just as they are, with no strings attached. Radical hospitality is not only open to others, but it is willing to adapt to others. It demonstrates a willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of newcomers. This adaptability keeps us from the dangers that can arise from being too inbred. The blessing of closeness has a dark side; it can keep people out. We must remain open to others, and even willing to change and be changed by the presence of others.

The truth must be told that we belong to the Body of Christ because of someone’s hospitality. No doubt, many of us are here because someone invited us, encouraged us received us, and helped us feel welcome. It might have been a parent, a spouse, a friend, a pastor, a chaplain or a stranger who offered radical hospitality. If we had not felt welcomed and supported in some measure, we would not have hung around. Radical hospitality is rooted in our lives and the Christian community that practices radical hospitality will demonstrate an open and welcoming stance for all people, at all times.

In so many ways we have been transformed. First of all, as a result of this study, there is more awareness today of the needs of strangers, neighbors and ex-offenders. As a

child, we were taught to be cautious and create immediate distance from the stranger; accepting no gifts or going anywhere with the stranger no matter what the stranger tells us. Second, it is understandable that it is a divine mandate to love the stranger, the neighbor, including the ex-offender regardless of race, nationality, or creed.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations for further collaboration between the Christian community and those returning citizens being released from incarceration has been fully explored given the time provided. However, new training models on utilizing radical hospitality as a tool are needed for effective and efficient ministry to everyone in the community. Continued pastoral counseling, education, pastoral leadership, rebuilding spiritual and social relationships must constitute to be the focus programs for growth and development within the Christian community.

This ministry project has only scratched the surface regarding the utilization of radical hospitality to acclimate African-American ex-offender males back into society after being released from incarceration. Law enforcement agencies and institutions must be adequately informed and understand the importance of extending radical hospitality to offenders and ex-offenders. Additionally, as a part of this transformative educational process, open communications must be the practice of the Christian community to assure an on-going success of inclusive programs for ex-offenders and all strangers who come knocking at their door. The practices of radical hospitality have a potential for changing individuals, institutions, communities and the world.

## Conclusion

The problem of recidivism is not only a thorny issue for federal and state institutions but to all communities to which these ex-offenders return. Therefore, as a prison chaplain this writer believes this study and its outcome can help transform the lives of ex-offenders when they are released from prison. Most importantly, the ex-offender should be willing to make the change with support from the Christian communities when they are released.

Coming to this country as an exile from war-torn Liberia, I understand how an African-American male ex-offender feels when he is released from prison and is not welcomed by the Christian community. When I arrived in the United States of America, if it had not been for the Christian communities offering radical hospitality to me, I would not have survived. It was The United Methodist Church in Maryland that whole-heartedly embraced me and extended radical hospitality. It is important for the church's leadership to understand this and the *modus operandi* of the penal system towards ex-offenders.

These lessons learned can be applied to my context of ministry as a chaplain in a minimum-security prison for men in Madison County, Ohio. I believe that if an ex-offender can be acclimated into a Christian community and offered radical hospitality, then recidivism could be decreased. However, when the offenders leave prison, there is little or no support from the Christian communities to keep them from returning to prison.

Specific practices the Christian communities should engage in regarding the practice of radical hospitality are:

- Create and implement programs to be Christ like in changing attitudes and thinking behaviors—learning how to trust people
- Stand against disrespect

- Establish partnerships for networking with stakeholders in society
- Offer prayers for law enforcement to do the right thing
- Establish circles of grace and love within their congregations
- Offer discipleship training
- Listen and support everyone—be inclusive
- Provide education to eliminate fear of the stranger, neighbor and offender

The Christian community, over the years, has failed to fully reach out to ex-offenders and welcome them as “returning citizens.” The Christian community desires to come into prisons to provide worship services but will not provide radical hospitality to an ex-offender when they leave prison. This practice is one of the reasons ex-offenders released from prisons are returning to prisons at an alarming rate. The Christian community, which is the body of Christ, has neglected the mission of the church to embrace the children of God who are “returning citizens.”<sup>5</sup>

Christian communities face challenges, fears and setbacks when they do decide to assist ex-offenders when they leave prison: There can be suspicion within the Christian communities that the ex-offender could return to his or her former criminal life style. In addition, not knowing the character or behavior of the ex-offender, there can be growing fear as to what he or she is capable of doing to the members of the Christian communities. The people to whom Jesus spoke knew all about hospitality, it was required from them to be hospitable. But Paul took it further because he understood that Jesus took hospitality further. Radical hospitality means being willing to seek and to save the lost. Radical

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<sup>5</sup> Graves. 1-10.

hospitality means being generous, even sacrificial with that with which God has entrusted us. Radical hospitality means working not only to be hospitable, but working and praying and hoping that those we touch with the power of love will be changed by what we say, or do, or offer in God's name. Radical hospitality is Christ centered.

**APPENDIX A**  
**OUTSTANDING AWARD LETTER**



[www.united.edu](http://www.united.edu)



4501 Denlinger Road • Dayton, Ohio 45426 • p: 937.529.2201

May 1, 2013

Archibald Bing  
1865 Big Tree Dr.  
Columbus, OH 43223

Dear Archibald,

You have been chosen to receive an award for Outstanding DMin Project in Justice and Mercy. Congratulations on your achievement!

This award will be presented to you during the May 23 Commencement Ceremony.

Again, Congratulations from the Dean's Office!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. F. Watson'.

David F. Watson, PhD  
Academic Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Spirit Led, Renewing the Church!

## **APPENDIX B**

### **JUSTICE AND MERCY WORKSHOP**



**JUSTICE AND MERCY WORKSHOP**



Church Leadership Training:

**Utilizing Radical Hospitality,  
Addressing the High Recidivism Rate of  
African-American Male Offenders in Ohio**

To be held at the

United Methodist Church for all People  
946 Parsons Avenue  
Columbus Ohio 43206

On August 9, 2014  
8am- 4:30pm

\* Breakfast and lunch will be served \*

**Special Presentations**

Radical Hospitality Practices by  
The Church for all People UMC

Radical Hospitality Practices  
By the New Life UMC

Opportunities for Individual Change:  
Opportunities for New Direction Re-entry Services

RSVP to:  
[archibaldbing@att.net](mailto:archibaldbing@att.net) or call to register  
Rev. Archibald H. Bing  
614-266-3387

## **APPENDIX C**

### **PRE-TEST (SURVEY)**

**PRE-TEST (SURVEY)**

1. What is your perception of a “criminal” returning from prison? Do you consider that person
  - ☐ 1. A child of God
  - ☐ 2. Someone that cannot be changed
  - ☐ 3. Someone that can be changed by the grace of God
  - ☐ 4. 1 & 3
  
2. Do you look down on African-American males who have been convicted of criminal offenses and incarcerated?
  - ☐ 1. Yes
  - ☐ 2. No
  - ☐ 3. Never
  - ☐ 4. Not sure
  
3. How would you describe radical hospitality?
  - ☐ 1. Welcoming and greeting all strangers at a “free store” and at worship Services
  - ☐ 2. Providing a safe place for worship, spiritual growth and fellowship
  - ☐ 3. Offering a hot meal on a cold day
  - ☐ 4. All of the above
  
4. Do you agree that biblical teachings on radical hospitality are essential for African-American male ex-offenders returning to the community?
  - ☐ 1. I strongly agree
  - ☐ 2. I do not agree
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure
  - ☐ 4. I agree
  
5. Are education and coping skills necessary to change behavior in African-American male ex-offenders?
  - ☐ 1. Strongly agree
  - ☐ 2. I do not agree
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure
  - ☐ 4. I agree

6. Do you believe that positive reinforcement is needed to change behavior of African-American male ex-offenders?
- ☐ 1. I strongly believe
  - ☐ 2. I do not believe
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure
  - ☐ 4. I believe
7. Do you think that African-American males convicted of felonies are second class citizens for the rest of their lives?
- ☐ 1. I strongly think they are
  - ☐ 2. I do not think they are
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure they are
  - ☐ 4. I think they are
8. Do you trust or can you trust a convicted African-American male criminals?
- ☐ 1. Yes, I do and can
  - ☐ 2. No, I do not and can not
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure if I can
  - ☐ 4. Number 2 and 3
9. Do you personally know any African-American ex-offender who has changed his life for the better?
- ☐ 1. I know one person
  - ☐ 2. I know two persons
  - ☐ 3. I know three or more persons
  - ☐ 4. I do not know anyone
10. Can you accept, forgive and welcome any strangers, especially an African-American male convicted criminal?
- ☐ 1. Yes, I can
  - ☐ 2. Yes, I strongly can
  - ☐ 3. No, I can not
  - ☐ 4. I am not sure

**APPENDIX D**  
**POST-TEST (SURVEY)**

**POST-TEST (SURVEY)**

1. After participating in the workshop, what is your perception of an African-American “criminal” returning from prison? Do you consider that person
  - ☐ 1. A child of God
  - ☐ 2. Someone that cannot be changed
  - ☐ 3. Someone that can be changed by the grace of God
  - ☐ 4. 1 & 3
2. Did the workshop change your perception of African-American males who have been convicted of criminal offenses and incarcerated?
  - ☐ 1. Yes
  - ☐ 2. No
  - ☐ 3. Never
  - ☐ 4. Not sure
3. How would you describe radical hospitality after participating in the workshop?
  - ☐ 1. Welcoming and greeting all strangers at a “free store” and at worship Services
  - ☐ 2. Providing a safe place for worship, spiritual growth and fellowship
  - ☐ 3. Offering a hot meal on a cold day
  - ☐ 4. All of the above
4. Do you agree that biblical teachings on radical hospitality are essential for African-American male ex-offenders returning to the community?
  - ☐ 1. I strongly agree
  - ☐ 2. I do not agree
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure
  - ☐ 4. I agree
5. Are education and coping skills necessary to change behavior in African-American male ex-offenders?
  - ☐ 1. Strongly agree
  - ☐ 2. I do not agree
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure
  - ☐ 4. I agree

6. Do you believe that positive reinforcement is needed to change behavior of African-American male ex-offenders?
- ☐ 1. I strongly believe
  - ☐ 2. I do not believe
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure
  - ☐ 4. I believe
7. Do you think that an African-American male convicted of felonies are second class citizens for the rest of their lives?
- ☐ 1. I strongly think they are
  - ☐ 2. I do not think they are
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure they are
  - ☐ 4. I think they are
8. Do you trust or can you trust an African-American male convicted criminal?
- ☐ 1. Yes, I do and can
  - ☐ 2. No, I do not and can not
  - ☐ 3. I am not sure if I can
  - ☐ 4. Number 2 and 3
9. Do you personally know any African-American ex-offender who has changed his/her life for the better?
- ☐ 1. I know one person
  - ☐ 2. I know two persons
  - ☐ 3. I know three or more persons
  - ☐ 4. I do not know anyone
10. Can you accept, forgive and welcome any strangers, especially an African-American male convicted criminal?
- ☐ 1. Yes, I can
  - ☐ 2. Yes, I strongly can
  - ☐ 3. No, I can not
  - ☐ 4. I am not sure

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